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A LONDON ROMANCE BY CHARLES H. ROSS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

A LONDON ROMANCE.

BY

CHARLES H. ROSS,

AUTHOR OF "THE PRETTY WIDOW."

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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STAATLICHE BIBLIOTHEK BAMBERG

A LONDON ROMANCE.

V.

AT AN AMATEUR THEATRE.

1.

THERE were many regular playgoers in the world taking a great interest in all things theatrical, who yet had never heard tell of the Boudoir Theatre.

The Royal Boudoir—it was familiarly known as the Royal Bedroom—was inconveniently situated, as far as the general public was concerned, up a very unlikely-looking street in an unlikely quarter of the town. From the outside its appearance was not inviting, for it had something of the look of a small chapel out of repair. Persons passing of a night by the open door were often startled by solemn and sepulchral sounds, and those who stopped and—as was generally the case—finding the doorkeeper's back turned, peeped in, most likely found the little stage occupied by an amateur of melancholy aspect, spouting blank verse to a select and dejected audience, who looked as if they had all made a mistake in coming, and would like to sneak away again if he would only take his eye off them.

Small playbills, very unlike the playbills at a regular theatre, were posted up outside the house, and remained there a long while after the evening to which they bore reference had passed away. The works of the Immortal Bard and other dramatic authors that cost nothing were generally selected for performance, and it was the habit of those who attended as spectators to give the preference to the legitimate drama, on account of the beauty of the language, though it must be confessed the language was not quite what the poet left it when the amateur had done his little best.

The audience—except on special occasions—was a very shabby one, and it was difficult to say to what class of life the persons belonged. Most of the spectators were well acquainted with the actors on the stage, and applauded them loudly upon their entrance. The actors belonged to clubs. The bills said that it was the twelfth performance of the Kemble-Keans, or the fourteenth of the United Thespians, as the case might be, and the audience, with a recollection of bygone triumphs, bade one another prepare for good things to come, for Bill This or Bob That was "first class" in such and such a character.

In their small way, then, some of these ladies and gentlemen had earned a reputation—had formed the subject of a biographical sketch in the *Amateur's Journal*, wherein the various performances were seriously criticized by the editor when he had time, or the amateurs themselves when he had not.

It was difficult to understand how some of these

amateurs could be so lost to all perception of the fitness of things as to make an exhibition of their woful short-comings, for at times there were knock-kneed amateurs, and bandy-legged, and squinting, and one-eyed; but again, there were clever ones as well, and now and then one left his club and took his place upon the boards of a real theatre and got to be a public favourite.

As a rule the actors were during the day shop-men or clerks; the actresses came from warehouses or workrooms. Most of the former acted for fun; the latter had more often aspirations. In the far-off future they pictured great dramatic triumphs; de-lighted audiences, thunders of applause, bouquets from a private box, and a call at the end of the act; but they were for the most part doomed to disap-pointment, these unfortunates, for few had pretty faces or figures, without one of which the unreason-able British public does not take kindly to female talent, however great it may be.

As it is in other walks of life, woman was woman's worst enemy. The ladies in front sniggered at the ladies on the stage. In their turn those on the stage pooh-poohed the others' little efforts when they took the place of those before the float. They spoke always pityingly of one another.

"That poor dear Mountmorency. Her friends ought not to let her make such a fool of herself. Be quiet now, do. It's very unkind of you to laugh."

Have you ever at the real theatre noted the in-tense delight of the ballet if by ill-luck one of the

première danseuse's petticoats gives way, or some similar misfortune befals her? How they stand there smiling sweetly, but taking good care not to tell her of it, while she smiles sweetly also, all unconscious. When a young lady met with a similar misfortune at the Boudoir there was great tittering. During the course of the witty old comedies and screaming old farces, the mishaps of the performers caused the greater part of the laughter. When everything went well it was thought to be a dull evening, and for that reason the tragic plays of the Swan of Avon were preferred by the audience, who, talking over a performance afterwards, would say of "Othello" or "Hamlet," perhaps, "I laughed, sir, till my sides ached. We all of us roared till we rolled off our seats."

There was one particular amateur, a large fat man with a tremendous voice, who enacted the Moor in a way so outrageously funny the whole house was on the broad grin from the time he entered the scene till he left it, and it was a thing never to be forgotten—the trick he had of slapping his thigh emphatically at the end of a telling speech, leaving the imprint of a hot black hand upon his white robe at every smack.

There was a melancholy long young man, who never could be induced to let the audience have more than a side view of him, and sometimes less than that—a russet boot and lanky leg alone being visible whilst he told his tale from behind a wing.

There were many who could not learn their parts, or forgot them in their fright when the time

came, and these followed the prompter blindly, repeating the words as nearly as they could catch them, with now and then diverting variations wholly unintentional. Sometimes, too, arguments would arise between the prompter and the prompted, which mixed in oddly with the proper dialogue of the piece, and wholly personal matters were discussed, culminating once or twice in fisticuffs and nosepulling, to the enormous delight of the spectators.

The stage was often kept waiting whilst these differences among the company were settled behind. Then some of the characters would appear prematurely, and deliver speeches in haste, which bore reference to events that had not yet transpired. As the actors all paid for their parts, it not unfrequently happened that one of them thinking he had not been allowed to do enough for his money, would remain upon the scene for some time after he should have made his exit. The introduction of laboriously comic gag was to be expected from this class of amateur, and it was not safe to trust him with a riding-whip or other offensive weapon, or pleasant to stand within his reach if he had one.

At all times the amateur crowd was extremely difficult to manage, owing not only to an undue rollicksomeness on the part of the crowders, but to the impossibility of any rollicking being done, in the limited space, without a leg or two going through the distant landscape. Some of these crowds—bands of lawless soldiery, red republicans, enthusiastic Irish peasantry, or the like—were pressed into the service only at the last moment, and though having but a

vague notion of the cause of their assembling, were none the less excited upon that account. Therefore they occasionally hunted down and captured the wrong man, or rushing in at the wrong time, seized upon and overcame with unnecessary violence an unhappy amateur who had yet a long speech to deliver, of which they would not allow him to say a word before they dragged him off.

The proprietor of this abode of the Muses was named Toogood—an unimaginative fat man, who took the strange things he saw and heard in the course of his professional duties as a matter of course, and never exhibited any signs of liveliness under any circumstances whatever, except when he saw his property being destroyed, and then he was very lively indeed.

Mrs. Toogood was said to have about her the remains of a fine woman, and these remains were on a large scale, as regarded nose and bust, and symmetrical proportions generally. She had been a beauty in her time, and had trod the boards as Miss Molflander, "of the London theatres." In those days a wicked lord was said to have ineffectually cast his snares around her, but she had given her hand and heart to the Toogood of her affections, and leaving the stage when her figure began to leave her, instructed pupils and got up amateur performances at the Royal Boudoir.

Even now, upon rare and special occasions, Mrs. Toogood (Miss Molflander, in parenthesis) would deliver a short address, or give a recitation, which was

always applauded to the echo. The editor of the *Amateur's Journal* before alluded to was one of the loudest and most persistent of the applauders.

"It's fine, sir; it's fine; it's devilish fine!" the old gentleman said, with enthusiasm. "The old style, sir; the right style. I knew that woman when she was a girl, sir. I was in the house, sir, the first night she ever came out, at the little theatre in the Haymarket, sir, in eighteen hundred and thirty-seven, when Sam Phelps played Shylock for the first time in London, and Molflander there was one of Portia's lady attendants. She was, sir, begad!"

But Toogood was not of theatrical antecedents. He had simply kept a shoe-shop in his earlier days. He was a family connexion of Molflander. They had loved one another ever so many years, and in the end had got married. Then the shoe-shop was abandoned, and this speculation of the Boudoir Theatre entered upon. The wear and tear attendant upon the getting up of amateur performances and keeping peace between the amateurs would have been too much for an excitable temperament, but Toogood bore the worry very easily.

He took no interest whatever in the acting itself —at least from an actor's point of view. When the performance was short, he called it a nice light night. When it consisted, as not unfrequently happened, of two three-act pieces and a farce, he called the night "heavy." He professed to provide all necessary scenery, but his stock was limited. He had only two streets in his collection, and if a third

were wanted, one of the two had to serve again. In the matter of properties he was unreliable. He had been known to supply a pincushion instead of the live hen in the "vendetta" scene in the *Corsican Brothers*. His banquets were unusually unreal; his practicable doors and windows of an unmanageable character. His rustic bridge was a structure of so rickety a nature that it imperilled the limbs of the venturesome; and his mossy bank—an unmistakable egg-chest painted green and ridiculously angular—was a thing which only the experienced could sit upon without incurring an unseemly upset.

Sometimes, when an actor was pulling or pushing at a door or window, wishing to get in or out, as the case might be, a voice from the side would be heard to say, "Shove it the other way, can't you!" This was Toogood's voice, and, acting upon the suggestion, the actor shoved the other way, and after shaking the whole edifice to its foundation effected his purpose.

It was a wonderful sight to see the simple Toogood in the midst of this unreal world, so cool and composed, when all others were breathless with excitement. He in his shirt sleeves and apron jostled by silks and satins. They rushing on and off the stage, giving hasty directions, snatching hurriedly at the properties wanted for the next scene. He phlegmatically receiving these directions without changing a muscle, to forget all about them the next moment, handing out wrong properties, or repudiating all knowledge of such articles being required, seeming to have but one aim and object in life, the

changing of the scenery as soon as might be, whether the scene were acted out or not.

And thus nightly the amateurs fretted their little hour upon the stage of the Royal Boudoir. Presently a new aspirant to histrionic honours joined their ranks, with whom we are already acquainted.

"I say, Toogood," said one day, in his off-hand style, Mr. Harry Draper of the Temple; "I say, can we give another performance here?"

"We've a lot of things on," replied Mr. Toogood; "two very heavy nights next week, but you know I'm always very happy to have your company here, sir. As Mrs. Toogood says, your real gentlemen it's a pleasure to serve. If they want a thing done well they don't mind payin' a fair price."

"We wont grumble about the money, I daresay," replied Draper, "but the thing must be well done; you understand. You'll have to screw up that confounded rustic bridge a little bit. We don't want to have anything to say to the mossy bank, and you'll most likely have to get a lot of new props—a ship, with guns to fire, and a life-sized elephant."

But this Toogood knew to be the gentleman's fun. Had he really seriously made a point of the elephant, Toogood would have promised it most faithfully, and when the last moment arrived, as likely as not would have argued that an allusion to its being off at the side would be quite as effective as its actual appearance.

"Say it's behind," was one of Toogood's favourite suggestions. If a shot ought to have been fired and

was not, "Pretend you heard it." Once, when the night came, he was unprovided with either scenery or properties for a whole act. "Say it's happened," he coolly observed, "and go on to the next."

2.

In the heat of her anger, Ann felt that she was quite justified in acting in the way she had done towards William Bradshaw. Upon reflection, however, she had her doubts.

She did not love him—never had done so, she thought now. She did not believe that he loved her. How could he, lecturing her as he did, and complaining of her every word and act. At any rate they were wholly unsuited to each other. It was much better that the match should be broken off. But then they had been engaged so long.

How could she break it off now, when it had been arranged for them all these years and years. It is true that it was broken off in a fashion by the quarrel, but then would he believe that she was really in earnest? When he came to think it over, would not he rather suppose that she had spoken hastily, and come next day to ask for an explanation of her conduct? In that case what could she do else but make it up with him again?

Mrs. Whitaker took this view of the case when she discussed the subject with her daughter. She had one question to ask, and would feel obliged if an answer were given her. If Ann did not marry William, whom else did she expect to marry?

Ann could not point to any probable husband. She ventured to suggest that there might be some one or other who might marry her even if William were lost. She also said that she was young enough yet awhile.

"Young enough!" cried Mrs. Whitaker. "How you talk! When I was your age I had been married a year at least. As it is, your engagement with William has been going on much too long. You shall write to him at once."

"Write to him, mamma!"

"Certainly. This very evening."

Ann did not argue the point. The artful puss perhaps supposed that it might be the surest way to gain her own ends if she allowed her mamma to think that she had carried the day. She thought, too, perhaps the old lady might forget to speak any more upon the subject that evening, and thus at least some time would be gained.

But in this idea she was wrong. Mrs. Whitaker again and again returned to the subject.

"Yes, decidedly you must write to him, and tell him how sorry you are for what you have said."

"I'm not sorry, mamma," Ann replied, at last losing patience.

"Not sorry!"

"No."

"Then you ought to be, that's all I've got to say."

"But I'm not, and I will not tell him that I am. It is all his fault."

"Hush, miss, hush! How dare you!"

Ann made no reply. It was, however, evident that she meant to be rebellious. Mrs. Whitaker sat reflecting, the famous half-mended stocking lying neglected in her lap.

"If you had another offer well and good," she said, presently. "Really, William is a little trying sometimes. He has no business to take the tone he does towards us."

"He would be only too happy to break off the engagement," said Ann.

Mrs. Whitaker suddenly veered round again.

"No, he wouldn't, miss. You know nothing about it. It is your bad temper alone that has led to what has happened. It is very wicked of you. I wonder how you can. But I see it all. It is those stupid tale-books, and plays, and nonsense you get hold of. What's that you've got in your hand now? Put it down this instant and find some needle-work."

Half an hour later the old lady continued in another strain—

"I can't think why on earth James should take it into his head to stop out all the afternoon and evening, just when he is wanted, too. I should like to consult him on the subject. I don't think it would be right to send a letter to William before consulting James. You see James is very well off —in a good position. Indeed I think he is much better off than William is ever likely to be for all his preaching. And he is extremely sensible. If it were James, now, instead of William."

"Mamma, how can you? As if it were likely!

James does not dream of such a thing. You would never think of saying the least word that would let him suppose we had ever spoken on the subject. I should die of shame if you did. Besides, I do not love him—never could—except as a brother. I do love him as a brother. He is very, very kind to us."

Mrs. Whitaker's dignity was ruffled by this appeal.

"I should hope, Ann, you will give your mother credit for not being *quite* a fool. I should hope so. Do you suppose I have no proper pride? Besides, of course I can see quite plainly what prompts James's kindness. It is quite humiliating enough, my dear, without your pointing it out, thank you. If your father had not been so foolishly obstinate we should never have been in this position, beholden for our daily food to another's charity. I am sure when I think of it my meals almost choke me."

She wiped her eyes and whimpered for a few moments, then rang for supper.

"There, put away your needlework, do, and let us have a game at cribbage; it will pass the time away."

After supper, James still remaining absent, Mrs. Whitaker declared her intention of acting promptly on her own account. She fetched her desk, unscrewed the inkstand, chose a new pen, spread out her paper, and began composing.

Several times she paused to ask Ann how certain words were spelt, and upon other occasions,

with varying success, searched for them herself in the dictionary. The rough draught of the letter at length completed, a fair copy was made, and then another, and finally the approved copy put into an envelope and sealed with elaboration and an unintentional "kiss."

Before closing the envelope, however, Ann was asked whether she would like to see it.

"I hope, mamma, you will not send the letter at all; I am determined not to marry him."

"How dare you, miss?" cried her mamma. "I am determined that you shall."

It was settled that the letter should be posted the first thing in the morning, after James had been consulted. James did not return until after the ladies had retired, letting himself in with a latch-key. Instead of going to bed like a reasonable creature then, he sat before the dying fire and smoked a series of pipes. No wonder that his rest was broken after such excesses. Mrs. Whitaker more than once during the night heard him wandering up and down his room.

Mrs. Whitaker's rest was broken also. She arose later than she had intended, and the letter she had written consequently did not go away by the first post.

The first post in, however, brought her a letter, which materially altered her plans. It was from William, and ran thus:—

"My dear Aunt,

"Your daughter has doubtlessly communicated to you the result of an interview which passed between us this morning. I regret that our friendly relations should terminate thus disagreeably; but it is a consolation to me to reflect that the blame is not upon my side, and that I can at least lay my hand upon my heart and say I have acted fairly and honourably throughout.

"It is not for me to blame Ann, or to point out to you what possible advantages our union would have possessed. Your daughter has chosen for herself: the past is irrevocable.

"After what has occurred, I need hardly say that all communication between us it would be advisable should cease. It is a source of comfort to me to know that you have found new and rich friends, and that when rejecting my assistance and co-operation, you will not, for a time at least, suffer in a pecuniary sense.

"As to any debt that may be owing to me from you, I beg that you will look upon it as cancelled.

"In conclusion, my dear aunt, I must once more express my sorrow that this should have occurred. I will not speak of my own sufferings, and the way I have been treated; there is One only who knoweth all things, and when the time cometh shall judge us upon our merits.

"I am, yours obediently,

"William Bradshaw."

The first thing Mrs. Whitaker did when she had read this letter was to tear up the one she herself had written into very small pieces. Then she re-read William's epistle, and was very angry indeed. The bell rang loudly, and Ann was fetched.

"Look here, my dear—look here, if you please. Did you ever read anything so—so insolent? Talking of my debt too—that ten pounds I suppose he means; but he shall have it back; every farthing of it, this very day. Give me my purse off the dressing-table."

The purse in question contained only seven pounds ten shillings, half of which sum was wrapped up in a butcher's bill it had been intended to settle, according to promise, that day. But there was James, was there not? He would not allow his aunt to be so insulted.

When James was presented with the letter above printed, he read it through very carefully, folded it up, and handed it back without a word.

"Well?" said Mrs. Whitaker.

"That's William, is it?" he asked.

"Of course it is."

"Ah! I don't seem to care so much about renewing his acquaintance as I did. On the whole I'm not sorry we missed one another."

"The tone he takes," said Mrs. Whitaker; "the way he talks to us, as if we were I don't know what—the dust under his feet; and the way he makes himself out to be all that's good, and us all that isn't. That was his way always; he always took the upper hand with us all, and we were that

meek and lowly—I can't think why. Sam was too. I've known your uncle ask William's pardon for saying 'damn it' before him."

"I can't say I like William—on paper," observed James, reflectively. "I should like to hear him in the pulpit though. I'll go next Sunday."

"It's more than I shall," said Mrs. Whitaker, warmly. "I've had enough of his chapels, and his tea-drinkings, and his Mrs. Hodsons, and the rest of it—quite enough, thank you kindly. There's a limit to everything. I mayn't be as humble as I ought to be, and I'm sorry for it; but kissing the rod wouldn't satisfy some folks unless you kissed every individual twig of it."

"Of course after what has passed, as he says, all communication should cease between you."

"That's easy to say, of course; but how can I submit to such insult? That he should have spoken in that way about ten pounds! It is true that it is a large sum to some people who are poorly off, but to others—oh, it's disgraceful of him!"

"Don't let that bother you," said James; and it is only fair to the old lady to add that from that time forth the ten pounds did not bother her at all.

"I suppose he'll send it back again," James said; but in this he was wrong.

3.

Another entertainment was given at the Royal Boudoir by those distinguished amateurs who had taken part in the celebrated Don Cæsar performance already recorded.

These entertainments were not quite of the same class as those ordinarily given by the amateurs who used Toogood's little Theatre. These were "Distinguished" amateurs, and this adjective was in some measure a term of reproach to the more lowly Thespians. The aspiring shop-boys could rather jealous of them; when they were they obtained admission on the night of the performance and cheered derisively.

The Distinguished called the other set "Cads;" the Cads called the Distinguished "Duffers." Mr. Toogood liked the Duffers; they paid much better. They were rather troublesome to manage about the short-comings of the properties, yet they were to be managed; and as the money was forthcoming it was as well to strain a point and indulge them.

The ladies assisting the Distinguished were not from the same class as those who played for the Cads. Some of the Cad companies prided themselves upon being working men, and had working girls to play for them; but the Distinguished hired real actresses, or professional amateur ladies.

These latter were not exactly real actresses, but yet recognised by the organs of the profession, and their efforts were uniformly praised in the reports of the doings at the Boudoir. They were the Misses Flo Spanglass, Joey Fitz, and Bel Bouncington, whose advertisements the curious may have read with wonder. "Miss Flo Spanglass attends amateur histrionic entertainments, military and otherwise. Land's End, 1st proximo; Duncansby Head, 2nd; other dates vacant. All letters respecting further engagements to be addressed to Miss F. S., at her private residence, No. 5, Aspasia Villas, St. John's Wood."

Miss Flo it was who took a prominent part in the fancy fairs organized in aid of the almhouses for superannuated supernumeraries—"the broken sticks," as they were termed. She was pretty and clever; but for some unexplained reason had only had one regular engagement, six weeks or so, during Christmas time, at the Great Sahara. It was supposed that she made a much better thing of it by amateur acting. She wore many rings, bracelets, chains, and other ornaments, and her terms were generally supposed to be expensive. Only the most daring spirits had ventured to offer her an engagement at a low price; others she had accepted only after swearing all concerned to solemn secrecy.

As for the Distinguished themselves, they belonged, as may be judged by the examples given, to the upper classes of society. There were a couple of captains, an honourable, a young lord even.

They acted for charities, and charged their friends large sums for the privilege of seeing them do it.

There was sometimes quite a run upon the front seats, and extra front seats had to be improvised. Members of a military band performed in the orchestra. Miss Flo and Co. were engaged at large salaries. There were refreshments of a choice character always to be had in the green-room, and the entertainment was generally followed by a supper. After deducting working expenses, the balance to be handed over to the charity was not, as a rule, a very large one.

Mrs. Whitaker, and Ann, and James were invited to the next performance, and had free admissions presented to them. Henry Draper asked Ann to take a part in one of the plays. "Not this time," she said; and he obtained a promise from her that she would certainly act with him next time.

If anything, this second evening was a greater success than that, the particulars of which have been already given. Everybody was highly delighted and amused, more particularly the Distinguished amateurs themselves who had taken part in it.

James, in that dry way of his—nobody ever distinctly understood whether he was in jest or earnest—wanted to know whether it was as good fun as a tea-drinking. Mrs. Whitaker was a little outraged at this. She did not think that such a comparison should be made; but she was not, somehow, nearly as severe in her opinions as heretofore.

If anything, Harry Draper surpassed himself.

He acted, as usual, an heroical character—a hero brave and noble. His handsome face, bright smile, and graceful figure kept all eyes—ladies' eyes at any rate—rivetted upon him; more than one heart fluttered tremulously as its owner watched him through her tears, and listened spell-bound to the beautiful sentiments he was uttering in the best blank verse. And how unworthy of him, they all agreed, was the lady of his choice, for whom he had suffered so much and so bravely.

In the afterpiece he also appeared, and this time played the part of a gay Lothario, in russet boots. It is doubtful whether the ladies did not admire him most in this character. Here he was again with the same handsome face—handsomer on account of some becoming ringlets—the same musical voice and deep thrilling tones, only his sentiments were highly reprehensible.

It seemed at first quite sad to think that that very good-looking young man could have turned so wild; and yet what a persuasive way the rascal had with him! What dreadfully good-looking, diverting dogs some of you naughty men are! Don't you think so yourselves?

"Oh, was it not beautiful!" Ann cried, when the curtain descended.

Harry Draper, abandoning the triumphs yet in store for him had he stopped to supper, accompanied the ladies home to Straggleton New Town, and there supped upon some little delicacies James Jarman had ordered to be sent in for their refreshment.

"Were you really amused?" Draper asked. He had made the inquiry once or twice before.

"Oh, so much!" replied Ann, in a low tone, full of gratitude and deep admiration. "And I was very frightened, too, at one part; it was dreadful."

"You mean where the fellow was coming in to stick me at the roadside inn. What a make up that was of the captain's, wasn't it?"

"Oh, he horrified me, and—and I could not help thinking it was real. Was I not foolish?"

"You thought he would hurt me, did you?"

"Yes; and how well you acted! Did not he, James?—was not the scene dreadful?"

"I thought it was beautifully acted," said James. "It put me a little in mind of something that occurred to me once somewhere in California."

"California!" echoed Mrs. Whitaker; "have you been there, among other places? It seems to me you've been all round the world."

"A great traveller!" said Harry Draper, with a slight suspicion of irony in his tone; "and what did my humble remind you of? Do tell us."

"No; it's not worth telling."

"Do, James," said Mrs. Whitaker; and they all pressed him.

James coloured up a little, and crumbled a piece of bread as he spoke.

"Oh, bother it; I wish I had not spoken. Well, then, I was lying all night in a log-hut—a sort of roadside inn or shanty—and the proprietor, a cut-throat ruffian, and a negro, a sort of servant of his, crept in on me, as the man did on you to-night. I

luckily overheard them planning the business, and more luckily still, only one came in at a time, and came in the dark."

"Yes; but is that all? What did you do?" Ann asked, eagerly.

"I'm not very strong, you know, and I don't think I'm any pluckier than I need be; but of course I saw I should be settled if I did not struggle for it; I could gain nothing by not using my knife."

But here he paused again, as though the story were concluded.

Ann asked in a tremble, and looking at him with great eyes—

"Did you use your knife?"

"Yes," said James; "I took the first by surprise. He died without a cry; but I stabbed him several times to make sure. Then I stood flat up against the wall by the door, and waited for the other. Of course I had to do the same by him, or I should not be here to tell the story."

There was a little silence after this anecdote. The theatrical hero looked at the real hero across the table with a little distrust. Ann almost shivered when presently the slight white hand of this traveller of terrible experience handed her a harmless bread-and-butter knife for which she had occasion.

4.

The third entertainment of the Rough Club was shortly to take place, and Ann had promised to take part in it. Some eccentric geniuses, more or less literary and artistic, had organized a club in the neighbourhood of the Strand, and called themselves the *Roughs*—hence the name of the amateur theatrical company performing at the Royal Boudoir. The members of the former club composed the latter, with the exception of the ladies, whose services were engaged for the evening only.

So great had been the success attending the former entertainments, it was resolved that at this should be put forth all the strength of the Club, and a new and original play, written by one of the Roughs, was that night to be first performed.

It was a well-written play, and in parts very witty; but the characters generally had a good deal too much to say for themselves. Nor could this easily be avoided, for everybody wished to have as much to say as possible, and each person desired to have the last word—an arrangement which threw considerable difficulty in our author's way, and appeared impossible to effect, unless the comedy should conclude with a chorus or a shout.

Before he had done with this company, little

Addleton and his comedy had suffered much, the latter being seriously mutilated. He began by calling it "Couleur de Rose;" but this French title was at once objected to. "Rose Colour" was not thought to be a sufficiently apt translation. "Life Through Rose-coloured Spectacles" was rather long and clumsy; besides, the principal character, the one who took a rosy view of things, did not wear spectacles.

"Why shouldn't he?" asked one amateur.

"Because he is a young man."

"Why not make an old man of him?"

"Because I should have to rewrite the whole piece."

"Why not rewrite it?"

Draper's friend, Tom Yolland, came to the rescue with—"Look Always on the Sunny Side." This was thought rather too long also; something short and crisp was wanted; why not "The Sunny Side?"

"You see, so much of the point lies in one of my characters repeating the words 'couleur de rose,'" Addleton explained. "I have made him a Frenchman for that very reason, and taken a great deal of trouble in consequence."

"There's no novelty in a Frenchman speaking broken English," another amateur observed; but the amateur who was cast for the Frenchman's character, and who firmly believed he was going to make a great hit with the dialogue, loudly protested against any alteration.

At least half a dozen rehearsals took place be-

fore any name was decided upon, and little Addleton was well-nigh worried out of his life by the various suggestions; finally, it was called "Making the Best of It," which was the best that could be made of it under the circumstances.

It was a difficult task to make matters pleasant with the ladies. Harry Draper had insisted that Ann should be the heroine: the author, not being very sanguine respecting the talents of an unknown person, objected with all his might; but Draper threatened to throw up his part unless he had his way. Draper was the author's great hope, and of course he must be humoured.

But the talented Miss Flo Spanglass was very angry. What next? she asked. Was she to play second to a nobody-knows-who? Not she, indeed! She only engaged for leading business. She would rather have nothing to do with the thing at all.

Poor little Addleton made a pilgrimage to St. John's Wood, and begged and entreated. He promised that Miss Flo's part, though nominally the second, should be really the first. He would cram it with jokes. He took away the copy he had given her, and sat up all night poking puns into its sentences; but next day when he called upon her and read aloud the results of his labour, she received his choicest witticisms with icy coldness.

"Puns are no good," she said; "I want a song and dance."

"But it is high comedy," he gasped.

"High or low, I can't help that. Come now, there's a dear little man, put them in somewhere,

or let me do so. Take it home again and think it over."

Little Addleton often said that never in his life before had he worked so hard, and on this occasion he was giving his labours gratuitously. In a usual way he wrote magazine articles, and was very popular with magazine proprietors. The public knew something about him. The lucky accident of his name beginning with an A led to its figuring always at the top of lists of contributors. There was very little to choose between him and Brown and Cooper; it would have been hard to say which was the best or worst of the trio; but alphabetically Addleton got the advantage, and it was many pounds in his pocket. The O's, P's, and Q's were passed over unnoticed in the long list of "best authors of the day."

With Toogood, little Addleton had a deal of trouble. The number of miscellaneous articles required in every scene was, Toogood said, "out of all reason."

"There's five pounds worth of props. wanted," he said to his good lady. "A working moon, if you please, and stormy waves! What a pack of nonsense, when twenty words would do much better if the character pointed off while he talked."

Ann was excited by the thoughts of what was to come; she could neither sleep nor eat. She was going to act in public. She was to wear white satin and stage diamonds, and have her hair powdered. How beautiful she would look.

Before her looking-glass she rehearsed the effect,

using her violet powder for the purpose. "Gracious goodness me!" cried Mrs. Whitaker; "what's the girl done to herself!"

She was quite perfect in her part twenty-four hours after it was given to her, for she thought of nothing .else. She repeated it to herself, and to herself in the looking-glass, and some of it to her mamma.

"My lord, I am a poor gentleman's daughter!" (this was in an earlier part of the play, previous to the white satin.) "Yonder, peeping through the trees, is the only home I have known. That thatch roof covers all on earth that I hold dear. A poor place enough, you may think, scarce worth while turning from the high road to go look at, but I have been very, very happy there, and on my bended knees each night I give my heartfelt thanks to heaven."

"Lor', how touching!" Mrs. Whitaker observed, the first time she heard this pretty sentence. Little Addleton had taken great pains with its composition, although it may not strike the critical reader as being particularly brilliant.

The lord the poor gentleman's daughter thus addressed was, you may be sure, a wicked one. A false-hearted, fascinating nobleman, impersonated by that celebrated amateur actor, Harry Draper, otherwise Le Mesurier. The celebrated Harry would insist upon being wicked. This was his particular line, and he found it very popular with his fashionable audience, who applauded him loudly on his

entrance and exit, and even received his naughtiest remarks with great favour.

At the performances of the Cad companies, now, this was not the case, any more than it is at a real theatre. Though the villains were not hissed, as at the latter, the right-minded among the audience regretted that the actor should throw away his talents in such a cause.

"It's such a pity he should do those characters."

The villains of the real theatres, it is well known, bring away with them a bad name when they leave the stage life for the domestic. There were many thousands of honest people who shuddered at the recollection of O. Smith, "that dreadful man!"

Two simple country folks went to the play, and saw *Virginius*. It was a fine performance, they agreed, and very cutting in parts. The most heart-rending scene, however, was where the man killed his daughter; "but that was all brought about by that beggar Jones" (the heavy villain). "He's always at some mischief or other, he is. I shan't support him at his benefit, if he has one. So I tell him!"

You may be certain Mrs. Whitaker had a great deal to say about the theatricals. At first she was not at all sure it was the right thing for Ann to take a part. To play before a houseful of people! To be made love to in public! No, it could not be thought of for an instant.

James, however, persuaded her that it was all right, and if James said so of course it must be.

"But then she can't be going to and fro alone to the rehearsals."

"I'll take care of her."

Therefore when Mrs. Whitaker could not go, which frequently was the case, in consequence of a severe cold she caught from one of the thousand and one draughts of the Boudoir Theatre, James accompanied his cousin and saw her safe home again.

"You've brought your body-guard, as usual, I see," observed Draper. "He seems to have a great deal more time on his hands than he knows what to do with. You're quite right to make him useful."

"He's very kind to mamma and me. I don't think I could ever find any one else as kind."

"He seems to mean well. He don't say much, but I suppose he thinks all the more. Couldn't you persuade him, though, to buy a differently shaped hat?"

"What fun you make of every one. Please don't talk like that. I don't like to hear anything against James."

"No, no; I beg your pardon. What right have I to speak at all. It is easy enough to see whom he is in love with and who loves him."

"You know it is not so, Harry. How can you say such a thing."

"I don't know. I'm a fool, I suppose. What does it matter to me! Why should I dream of impossible happiness? Ah, if you knew the story of my wretched life."

"Your wretched life! Tell me——"

"Lord Ladyslay," called out Little Addleton, excitedly. "Do, please, Draper, listen to what's going on. You ought to be on now. If it isn't done to the moment all the effect will be spoilt. Look here now, somebody, please. Don't all go away. We must have that scene over again."

There was not the slightest foundation for this statement respecting the wretchedness of Mr. Draper's past life. He was always heaving sighs over perfectly imaginary griefs. He was always acting a part. He was the Corsair of the Middle Temple! As well as it could be understood by those who gave some time and trouble to deciphering his character, he seemed to wish it to be vaguely supposed that he had terrible crimes upon his conscience—that he had led a wild and reckless life, and the blighting of happy homes lay heavy upon his soul. But this was all fiddle-de-dee from beginning to end.

Tom Yolland, that friend of his who shared his rooms, noticed some of the by-play at the wing during the rehearsals, and questioned Draper upon the subject.

"What the deuce are you about with that girl? Her eyes follow you as though you had her purse in your pocket and she was afraid you would try to run away unless she kept a sharp look-out on your movements."

"Poor girl!" said Harry, in his most tragic tone. "Poor girl! But what am I to do?"

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure," said Tom Yolland.

There came on about this time a period of mystery and bewilderment, in which nobody exactly knew what anybody else meant or was driving at, when all day long it was as it is in some melodramas at the transpontine and provincial theatres. Anon, anon. Let us bide our time; we must dissemble and—— Hush, we are observed.

5.

Sometimes Mrs. Whitaker could not help asking herself what William would say to this amateur business if he knew of it, and she felt occasionally ill at ease.

William's opinions had always been violently antagonistic to things theatrical. Poor Samuel, too, although he was professionally engaged at the Great Sahara, had a pious horror of those who trod the boards rouged and bewigged. He maintained that pure-minded women and children had no business at the play. What did they hear there but lies and bad language.

Some people arguing the case with the late Mr. Whitaker, asserted that only the best of morals were inculcated by stage representations, pantomimes excepted; that virtue was always rewarded and vice always punished; that the lower you descended in search of the dramatic element, the more triumphant virtue was, and the worse punishment awaited the vicious. Strange as it might appear, in the regular right down bad neighbourhoods the morals were more strict, the villain more deeply execrated, the virtue of the heroine above price, more intently admired, and her welfare watched over with a more anxious solicitude.

It did one good, the supporters of the drama protested, to see the pure and guileless coster in his threepenny gallery, following with a childish admiration as much of the moral sentiments as he could understand, applauding loudly those to whom he thought applause was due, and loading with contumely the baffled ruffians of high estate.

Gradually Mrs. Whitaker's prejudices gave way. At first it was only amateur performances she could countenance; but one night James brought home "dress circles," and the ladies accompanied him to see a pantomime. There was not any person present, old or young, who laughed half as long or loudly at the clown's nonsense—very dreary nonsense, by-the-way, as it generally is now-a-days.

Long after, the bare recollection of this person's comicalities caused Mrs. Whitaker to burst out laughing, and she gave hazy accounts of what she had seen to Harry Draper, Mrs. Pickering, Hannah the servant even, all of whom politely agreed with her that it must have been very funny indeed, though they did not distinctly see where the fun of the thing lay from her description.

Ann did not approve of the clowning to the same extent as her mamma. She did not care much for that sort of thing. Already this young lady had got her notions. She wanted to copy Nature—to act her part as a person so placed in real life might have done. She once argued a point with Little Addleton.

Little Addleton wished her in one of the scenes "to take the stage" with tragic stride whilst giving

utterance to certain sentiments of a high-flown character. Though professing herself an incompetent judge of the suitableness of the words employed, she altogether protested against the "business." The business meant taking the stage; or in other words, crossing from wing to wing with a tragical action.

Little Addleton was staggered by her objections, and gave way. He generally did so. Several times during each rehearsal he had to knuckle under to the great Flo Spanglass, who had a way of beginning her objections with—"Oh, I say, Mr. Addleton, this sort of thing wont do at all, you know," which filled our author's heart with forebodings of coming evil.

There was only one person in all the caste who did not stand out for sweeping alterations, and he who took things quietly did not learn his part at all, but gagged every scene when the night came.

The preparation of Ann's toilet was a work of time. There were journies and journies between Straggleton New Town and the costumiers in Bow Street. The white satin was tried and retried, and James acted most uncommercially in the transaction by saying upon all occasions that no expense need be spared.

In the end, however, the effect was very striking. Ann was early at the theatre: only one other person had arrived—Little Addleton, who looked worn and weary.

"That's right," he cried when he saw her. "You're here, anyhow. You'll do your best, Miss Mortimer, wont you? (Mortimer was her theatrical

name.) I've asked some great guns to be here to-night. Jason Burgoyne, the author and actor, you know, and Jones from the Strand. Unluckily, there's a ben on somewhere that Jones's got to play at. Altogether he has to appear in three pieces at his own and the other theatre. However, he said he would look in if he had time."

Three of the gentlemen arrived. One sat down directly, and began learning his part. Little Addleton looked at him uneasily.

"Do try and stick to the words as much as you can, old fellow," said he.

"I'm all right," the other replied. "I'm perfect in the cues, at any rate."

"He's a perfect cue-er, he means to say," said Miss Flo Spanglass, who arrived at this moment. "Look here, you dear little man," she continued, to the author, "there's something wrong about this song after all. Suppose I leave it out, now, and put in one of my old favourites."

Several other amateurs arrived after this; but one of the principal ones was absent. Report said he had a dreadful cold in his head.

The performances were to begin with an original address to be spoken by the absentee. After the overture had been played over twice—the audience beginning to get a little restive meanwhile—somebody else read the address, and then there was an interval of intense excitement, in which messengers were despatched right and left in search of the missing man.

This individual came at last, after a second

apology had been made on his account, and then poor Little Addleton's comedy proceeded somewhat smoothly. Of course there were many shortcomings with respect to properties, and some portion of the action was in consequence rather difficult to follow; but the dialogue was generally allowed to be witty, and frequent laughter and applause resulted.

In the first scene Ann looked very well, but was not quite loud enough. This was not to be wondered at in a *débutante*.

"Speak up," said Little Addleton. "Don't be afraid."

In the next scene Ann had to act with Harry Draper. She had rehearsed this part with him a dozen times at least. She acted it with all her heart—all her soul. At some points it was scarcely acting. Her supple form and soft flowing drapery fell naturally into a score of graceful shapes—her fair arms clung to him. There were a good many among the audience who would have given a trifle to have that young head resting on their breasts.

The curtain descended on Act I. Hitherto the piece had been very successful. The audience, as is usual at amateur entertainments, were kindly disposed, and finding something that was really not bad, were quite enthusiastic in their applause.

In Act II. the satin dress was to be worn—some deeply thrilling love passages were to occur. All Little Addleton's strength lay in this portion of the drama.

The first scene opened with a love passage between Ann and her virtuous lover. He took his

departure. She looked off after him with tearful eyes. She owed him a debt of gratitude. She gave him her promise that she would be his, and she would keep that promise come what might.

The wicked lover came—Harry Draper, in a travelling cloak and jack boots. He threw aside the cloak, and discovered the most becoming of riding dresses—green and gold. He poured forth his love-tale in low earnest tones. He entreated her to fly with him. He vowed that his love was eternal. The pleading voice seemed to draw her to him. How could she resist?

A great actress (was it Miss O'Neill?) thus defined the difference between John Kemble and Edmund Kean:

"If I had been Juliet when Kemble played Romeo, I think in the end I should have helped him up to the balcony. If it had been Kean making love, I could not have helped myself. I must have jumped off the balcony to him."

It is a great art that of making love either on or off the stage, and how few men do it well! Women as a rule make every allowance for the love-sick bunglers. Their confusion and clumsiness are in a measure flattering. One might imagine the noonday sun would wax wrath if a bold-eyed mortal stared him out of countenance without blinking.

Harry Draper made love nearly as well as Fechter, or Dominick Murray. How could she resist him? She could not, and would not, had not the

exigencies of the drama necessitated some procrastination.

An approaching footstep startled them. Harry sprang out of the window. The poor gentleman (Ann's father) entered. He kissed her and bade her good night. Left alone in the quaint Gothic chamber, she wiled away the time by soliloquizing before a mirror.

The moon rose and shone through the lattice window, its beams falling upon her face and the white satin dress she wore. What was going to happen now? The hushed audience in a tremble of excitement waited anxiously.

All at once a dark figure appeared upon the scene, advanced rapidly, and caught the heroine by the wrist. Some hurried words passed between them, but in a tone too low for those in front to catch, and then the dark figure was seen dragging the heroine from the stage, and she suffered him to do so without resistance.

Then a great hubbub arose in front, and some called "Shame" and some "Encore," and there were laughter and applause and sibilation. For the dark figure was attired in modern clothes unlike the dresses of the other characters—wearing a broadish brimmed hat, a white neckerchief, and black gloves, and in one hand he brandished an umbrella.

It was William Bradshaw who had thus broken in upon the performance of little Addleton's comedy, and who, during a moment when the author, Draper, and the stage-manager were temporarily absent from the stage, seized on, and carried off the heroine,

whom he took away speechless and helpless in a cab.

Five minutes afterwards there was such an uproar in the Boudoir Theatre as never occurred within its walls before or since.

6.

For the length of two or more streets the cab travelled before Ann had sufficiently recovered her senses to make any effort at resistance. The attack had been so bold, so sudden, there had been no fighting against it.

She had always been somewhat afraid of William. She had dreaded his hearing of the theatricals, to which she knew him to be greatly averse. His appearance at that moment, when no one was by to help her, had for a time deprived her of all presence of mind. But as the distance increased between her and the theatre, the full force of the absurdity of her position appeared to her.

Was she a child to be treated thus? Was it possible that such an outrage could be perpetrated in a free country, et cetera?

"How dare you act this way?" she cried. "Stop the cab. Let me out!"

She turned to open the window, but he held her wrist.

"How dare you?" he said. "How dare you degrade and disgrace yourself and me and all belonging to you? If you had not that paint upon your face you must blush, unless you are indeed lost to all sense of shame?"

She struggled to free her hands, but he held them tightly. She could have cried with rage.

"What do you mean by speaking to me in such a way?" she asked, in a broken voice. "Do you think I care for your stupid, bigoted notions? I will be an actress if I choose. Others far wiser than you wish me to go upon the stage, and I am decided now. I will! I swear it."

"Hush! hush! You cannot mean what you say. I thank Heaven I came in time to save you from further humiliation. I hope that the mummeries had not been going on long."

"Stop the cab, will you, or I will scream for help! I want to go back. I *will* go back."

"No, you shall not do that, Ann. I will take you home to your mother. It is without her knowledge that this has occurred. I am sure of that."

"You are quite wrong there," Ann retorted. "She is at the theatre, among the audience, and so is James."

William seemed a little staggered by this intelligence. His brows were knit, and his handsome face wore a savage and determined expression she had never seen on it before.

"Are you speaking the truth?" he asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Then if your mother is incapable of taking charge of you, I must do so in her place. I will take you home, and we will wait there until they return."

"No, no," said Ann, losing all control over her-

self, and bursting into a paroxysm of tears. "I will not bear it. Help! help!"

The cabman stopped abruptly. Ann cried again for help. "Hollo," said the man, "what's amiss?"

"Let me out--let me out!"

"Drive on," cried William. But the cab remained stationary. Some passers-by halted on the pavement and listened in wonder.

"I ain't going to be a party to anythink o' this sort," the cabman said. "What's it all mean, if you please? You're a parson, ain't you? What's your game with the young woman?"

"Do as I order you," said William, in a trembling voice. "Drive on. I am a relation of this young lady. She is under my charge."

"It is not true," Ann protested. "Let me out. Help! help! will nobody help me?"

The crowd, greatly augmented, pressed round the door. It was a narrow street, and the cab blocked up the road in consequence of a van being drawn up against the pavement just ahead. The driver of a brougham in front was calling out impatiently for the cab to move out of the way. A gentleman in the brougham looked out and asked what was the matter.

Various members of the crowd volunteered information.

"A parson running away with a gal in white satin."

"A play-acting woman."

"She's got her hair all over whitening, she has; and she's covered all over with diamings, she is."

The description interested the gentleman in the brougham, who himself had a professional air about him. He alighted hurriedly.

"Can I be of any assistance?"

Already Ann had opened the door and sprung out. It was raining briskly. The streets were very dirty. The train of the famous white satin trailed in the mud.

"Oh, thank you," she said. "I want to go back to the theatre. I am an actress, and this—this fanatic has dragged me from the stage in the middle of a scene. He has no right to do so—no right at all to interfere with my actions."

"It is only for you to say," the gentleman observed in his well-known voice and with his well-known manner. "If you place yourself under my protection I will see you safely back again."

The crowd recognised him.

"It's Jason Burgoyne."

Burgoyne smiled. He liked this sort of thing. It all did in the way of advertisement.

"Did you wish to return to the theatre, madam?" he asked.

"Yes, oh yes," said Ann. "If you would kindly find me a cab."

"Which theatre is it you want to go to?"

"To the Boudoir."

"My brougham is at your service. I am going to the Boudoir myself."

All this while William had stood silent, with compressed lips and heaving breast, and, altogether, a most unclerical look upon his face.

He here laid his hand on Ann's arm.

"You will not go back," he said.

"Yes, I will."

"With—this—man?"

Ann turned away without a word.

The rain was coming down faster. She was glad enough of the brougham's shelter. William looked after Ann's protector with a still more angry expression. It is probable that the latter gentleman thought it far from unlikely that the scene might assume melodramatic proportions. He kept his eye fixed upon the minister.

When Ann had taken her seat, Burgoyne also stepped into the brougham, and it began to move on. The van had gone by this, and the brougham therefore passed by the cab. William stood still a moment as though uncertain what to do, then plunged through the mud in pursuit, and laying his hand on the door, called out some words which were inaudible to the girl. The driver whipped his horses, and they dashed on.

Left in the road, bareheaded—for his hat had fallen off when he sprang forward—splashed with mud from the carriage-wheels, the minister presented rather a woful aspect. The driver of the cab not clearly understanding the case, but fancying he understood just this much—he was going to be done out of his fare—came up with a bullying tone and demanded his rights. The crowd around joined in his abuse.

William's inquiry for his hat was met by derisive jeers. Somebody from behind pushed some one who

stood nearer roughly against him. Somebody flung a piece of orange peel, which struck him in the face. The crowd laughed loudly.

William grasped his umbrella, and brandished it like a sword. He seemed as though he meant to charge his tormentors, and deal destruction right and left. But his better judgment coming to his aid, he thought of the scandal which might ensue, and the harm that it would do him, and turned away.

They were only waiting for this. In an instant he was hustled and pushed and pelted. Had a policeman not come fortunately to his rescue, he might have been rather roughly handled. As it was, he only had his pocket picked.

7.

When Ann returned to the Boudoir she found affairs in an alarming state. Poor Little Addleton was prostrated, mentally and physically. Harry Draper was looking very savage; the rest were complaining loudly, with the exception of Miss Flo Spanglass, who looked on with a sarcastic smile.

"I thought how it would be," she said.

How could she have expected any such *fiasco?* Oh, you ladies! you ladies! how you do hate one another!

They were all dumbfounded at seeing Ann come back; and for some moments it appeared as though the circumstance was not likely to help the actors out of their difficulty. Harry Draper, however, his first surprise over, was equal to the occasion.

"I'll go in front and explain matters, and ask for a short delay."

"Oh, how can I go on again?" said Ann. But they crowded round and persuaded her.

Draper stepped in front of the curtain. The audience were in an unsettled state. Some were leaving the theatre with loud expressions of disgust.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Draper, "let me entreat your indulgence and consideration for three

minutes only, and the young lady will resume her performance."

There was astonishment and applause; for they had been told a few minutes previously that the young lady had been taken suddenly ill.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he continued, "I have a very extraordinary revelation to make. You have many of you, I daresay, heard of a popular performer of the name of William Bradshaw—I mean, of course, the Reverend William Bradshaw we read so much about in the papers."

Here there was a half-laugh. Was a joke coming? It would not do to be premature.

"He is not, strictly speaking, in the same line of business as your humble servant," continued Draper. "He has been recently 'starring it in the provinces;' but I believe his is not exactly the legitimate drama."

Here the laugh was louder and more general.

"I am proud to say, that for the Boudoir Theatre this very evening has been reserved the honour of his first appearance on any stage. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, astonishing as it may appear, the mysterious figure you saw upon the scene some twenty minutes ago, whose name was not to be 'found in the small bills,' was none other than the celebrated Mr. Bradshaw."

Loud applause and laughter.

"And how do you think it occurred? I will tell you. Mr. Bradshaw objects to dramatic entertainments: objects to them very much indeed. He means,

if he can, to put them down altogether: only I do not think he will be able to do so."

Applause.

"Not if you will still give your patronage to them, ladies and gentlemen."

Very loud applause indeed.

"Mr. Bradshaw thought he would begin with the Boudoir. He said to himself, I suppose, "Here is a young lady who will make a noise in the world, and a great name for herself in the profession.'"

Tremendous acclamations.

"'She shan't do it,' said Mr. Bradshaw, waving his umbrella. You saw the umbrella, ladies and gentlemen."

Screams of laughter.

"And so Mr. Bradshaw and his umbrella triumphed for a time. I say for a time; but the young lady was rescued. By whom? By none other than Mr. Jason Burgoyne, the celebrated dramatist, who chanced to be passing in his carriage at the moment that this man Bradshaw was dragging the poor defenceless young lady away in a street cab. Yes, in a four-wheeled street cab."

Profound sensation.

"Ladies and gentlemen, after what I have said, I know I need not ask for your forbearance, should the young lady's very natural agitation, after such an unusual outrage, somewhat impair her performance of the other act of our comedy. She will, I know, do her best through love of a profession in which her beauty, grace, and talent hold forth such bright promises for the future. Ladies and gentle-

men, I beg to apologize for trespassing upon your time."

There never yet was speech better calculated to enlist an audience's sympathy. A round of applause and a call for the heroine of the evening succeeded. She was led on by Draper amidst general acclamation.

There was a call from some unseen quarter for William Bradshaw, and to this Draper replied:

"I think I am authorized to state, ladies and gentlemen, that Mr. Bradshaw has run away, umbrella and all. He will, however, by particular desire, make his re-appearance upon some future occasion, and dance a hornpipe."

The curtain now very shortly drew up upon the interrupted scene in the comedy, the mud having been wiped off the white satin as neatly as could be; and the act was brought to a triumphant conclusion. Poor Ann did certainly exert herself to the utmost, and the performance was a creditable one: in some parts, really artistic and clever.

When at last the piece was concluded, there were calls for author and actors. Few theatrical triumphs could have been more complete; and one wondered how so successful an affair could be disposed of in so few words when the theatrical organs treated of it in their Saturday's impression.

But how about William after his woful discomfiture? In what out-of-the-way hole-and-corner had he hidden his diminished head? When Ann and her

mother, and James Jarman, reached home about half-past one o'clock in the morning, they found William waiting for them in the parlour. He was sitting bolt upright clutching his umbrella.

8.

THEY all came to a standstill at sight of the visitor. James was the first to speak. He instinctively knew that this was his cousin.

"Why are you here?" he asked. "What do you mean by your conduct of this evening? You must not act in such a way again, or we must treat you like a ruffian or a lunatic."

William blushed red, then turned white.

"Who are you to question my conduct? Ah, I suppose the rich cousin? Well, I have nothing to say to *you*. I must speak to my aunt."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear, William! I really wish you wouldn't," said Mrs. Whitaker. "I don't feel at all well. Do be reasonable. Wherever is the harm?"

"The harm! The disgrace—the infamy, you mean. Where is it to end?"

"Your views are very violent," said James "Even if you object to the stage as a profession, you must understand that Ann was only acting for amusement."

Ann broke in, impatiently:

"I will go on the stage as an actress if I like. Why should I not? I think I shall."

"Oh, dear me, Ann," cried Mrs. Whitaker; "how can you go on so before your cousin William, when you know he does not like it?"

"He has no further claim upon me," said Ann. "All is over between us."

"Yes; I know that," said William, in a dogged tone. "I wont interfere again. I only came here to make quite sure that what you were doing was with your mother's consent. I cannot understand it; but, if it is to be, so be it. I wash my hands of the affair from this moment." And he moved towards the door.

Mrs. Whitaker, who, with a very miserable aspect, was sitting shivering before the fire, as near to it as she could get, here interposed:

"Dear me, how sad all this is! When you know too that you have both been engaged to be married since you were little children. How can you, Ann, want to go on with your play-acting if William does not like it? There, there, sit down all of you, and let's have a bit of supper."

There was no supper to sit down to, for they had supped at the theatre itself, with champagne and speeches. Every one looked round at the old lady when she made this remark. She was nodding her head at the flames, and rubbing one hand over the other dreamily.

"Your mother is not well," said James. "We must not keep her up any later. I will call on you and talk this over, William. You had better go now."

William went, and a few minutes later James fetched a doctor.

Next day when the Reverend Mr. Bradshaw was seated at his desk jotting down notes for his Sunday's discourse, a stranger was announced. It was Mr. Harry Draper.

"Mr. Bradshaw, I believe?"

"Yes. I have not the honour of knowing *you*."

"My name is on that card. I will as briefly as possible explain the purport of my visit. You took a very strange part yesterday at an amateur performance at the Boudoir Theatre."

"I took a part?"

"You understand me, I am sure. You interfered with a young lady in an unwarrantable and ungentlemanly manner. If you were not a clergyman I would horsewhip you for it."

William started to his feet.

Draper continued—

"You need not call for assistance. There is no danger."

William laughed harshly.

"I am quite well aware of that. None at all. You mistook my motive. I wasn't going to ring the bell, I was going to knock you down."

Draper, in a fury, raised his walking-cane.

"Why, you cur," he cried, "if you threaten me I wont spare you after all. Take that."

William took nothing, however, for he caught Draper by the wrist in an iron grip, and wrenched

the stick away. The other closed with him in the most scientific fashion, but his science was as naught against his antagonist's strength. A desperate but brief struggle, and he was pinned, panting, to the wall.

Then William said, in a voice which was but little agitated—

"It is as well, perhaps, that I am a clergyman, as you say, or I might be tempted to throw you out of window."

Draper raged furiously but impotently for awhile. At last, seeing how hopeless was the case, he mastered his rage.

"You have got the best of it so far. I've been ill lately, or you would not have come off so well. But for all that don't think you can pursue the conduct of yesterday night with impunity. There are other weapons besides fists. I am determined to protect that young lady, and I will."

"What is the young lady to you?"

"No matter. You have no right to ask. All relations between you have ceased."

"She is still my cousin, you must remember, and I shall use my own discretion as regards my future acts. You will excuse me if I say that I hardly think you are the most desirable and discreet champion that she could have chosen."

Draper, still at a great disadvantage, seemed to lose all his old power of sarcasm and irony. He could only bluster.

"I give you fair warning, mind. It will be a dangerous game if you persist in it. You have a

name and a position to lose, and cannot afford to be dragged into a scandal. The whole affair shall be made public, rely on that. Now, take my advice, and be quiet. Your interference is not wanted. Your good advice will be thrown away."

"Read this," said William, and he handed the other a letter, which ran thus:—

"My dear Nephew,

"I have been thinking of what occurred last night, and have been very unhappy. Ann was wrong, and this must not go on as it is. My poor Samuel's dying wish was that you should be united. Come to me at once, I am very poorly.

"Your affectionate aunt,

"Sarah Whitaker."

"Are you going?" asked Draper.

"Certainly."

"Is it a battle between us, then?"

William smiled, and resumed his place at the table; and Don Cæsar, not quite so Don Cæsarlike as usual, took his departure. He went home in a fury, and had some notion of sending Bradshaw a challenge.

"The low, canting beggar would not accept if I did. But he shan't triumph over me for very long, although his muscle is a little harder than mine."

While these thoughts were passing through his brain, our hero took up his dumb bells and began

to practice. He surely never meant to go into training, and have a regular set-to with his reverend rival. No, he was not as foolish as all that. He had a scheme in his head—a great scheme, by which was to be obtained a grand dramatic vengeance.

9.

Mrs. Whitaker was very ill indeed. She had caught a fresh cold on the top of the old one. "Those wretched theatricals," she said. "Ah, Ann! I wish we had never had the misfortune to go to such a place. It's a judgment—I'm sure it's a judgment."

She sat up in bed, and with a painful effort wrote the letter just now reported, to William Bradshaw; and while she waited for his coming she again and again referred to the subject.

"You must make up your quarrel, Ann. It is my wish—my dying wish—for I feel sure I am not long for this world. I must see you once more reconciled, and then I shall die happy."

Ann made no reply. It was useless to argue the point with the old lady, upon whom words had no effect. Should she seek James, and ask his advice? Unfortunately he had gone out. He had been out all day.

William called in the afternoon, and Ann was present at an interview between him and her mother. Mrs. Whitaker treated it as a matter of course that a reconciliation must take place. William had some good advice to give. He regretted that Ann should be so hasty—so wayward. But she had a good

heart. She would see upon reflection that her conduct had been very improper.

Ann stood by silently. She might have been acquiescing in the arrangement. She was, instead, in a fury.

"The poor child will be homeless and friendless when I die," said Mrs. Whitaker. "What little money remains will scarcely support her, and how can she live unprotected? No, I must see her married, and then my mind will be at rest."

When William had gone, Ann burst into a fit of passionate tears.

"How can you, mamma, shame and humiliate me in this way! If I had to beg my bread in the streets, I would rather do so than be dependent upon him. I hate him, mamma, and I love some one else."

"Oh, how you talk! What a strange girl you are! I'm sure I don't understand you."

She did not, indeed, poor lady, for her wits were wandering.

That night, instead of James's return, a letter came from him, saying that he was obliged to be away upon some important business. He might be absent a couple of days. Ann was in great distress. Here, at the moment when she most wanted his help, her friend and adviser was absent. To whom could she apply?

While she was still hesitating, next day William wrote to her. It was a long letter, very carefully worded, and very precisely written, with not an *i*

undotted or a *t* uncrossed. It said that for his part he was willing to overlook the past, and that he should be hopeful of the future, if she but gave him her assurance that as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made, she would dissociate herself entirely from all recently-formed friendships.

He had, he reminded her, yet a way to make in the world. He occupied a position where many, many thousands of eyes were fixed upon him; there must not be the faintest breath of scandal attached to the woman whom he was to make his wife. It was true that several advantageous unions were open to him did he choose to contract a matrimonial alliance with one of certain members of his congregation; but through life he had never broken his word or departed from his promise. He had promised his aunt that he would marry Ann, and that promise he was now ready and willing to fulfil.

Ann read all this through—eight closely-written pages—with a face which alternately flushed and paled. Then she tore the letter up into small pieces, placed the fragments in an envelope, and directed it to Mr. William Bradshaw.

The servant girl, who had unobserved seen the action, took the letter to the post with a chuckle. When she returned she found Ann dressed ready to go out.

"I shan't be long," she said; and she took a cab to the Temple.

VI.

IN PARADISE AND ELSEWHERE.

1.

Things lately had been going very badly indeed with the struggling shopkeepers of Straggleton New Town. The hostelry of the "Four Winds" had changed hands, the late landlord retiring to White-cross-street. Only a little while ago he had been sanguine as to the success of his new billiard-room —for at first there had been a good deal of custom for it.

Driven to desperation, the shopkeepers had come there to drown their sorrows in the bowl, and in a friendly way had taken each other's lives at pool over his green-baize table. But though things looked promising, the proprietor of the house lost patience, and wanted his rent. The billiard-table was seized in default.

So very bad a look-out was there from a commercial point of view in Straggleton New Town, that even the most sanguine building societies gave up the idea of new streets in despair, and endeavoured to dispose of their skeletons at a loss. On all sides therefore were to be seen the crum-

bling frameworks of houses that were never to be. A high wind arose and blew a lot of them down.

Such streets and houses as had been finished before all hope of the new town had died out, grew somehow prematurely aged. The gas-works and other works, all of a smoky nature, blackened the face of nature round about, so that the very buds in spring-time were dirty and soiled. The only things indeed that flourished in this unhappy neighbourhood were babies. There must have been something in the air beside the factory smoke, for not only did they thrive upon production, but they were produced in unreasonably large numbers, so that it seemed that every house had its twins, and those twins were always squalling.

The fathers of this numerous progeny were mostly in a bad way as regarded funds: In a time of full work and much overtime they saved nothing. The low beer-houses in those parts, fitted up with roughly made deal tables unpainted, were full of drunken mechanics every night—working men they called themselves—proud of their dirty fists and the honest perspiration of their brows.

Then came a strike, during which the brokers were very busy, and the loan-offices—there were two already, both doing a roaring trade—showed their teeth at many a fireside. The "United Vultures," and the "Judas Iscariot Friendly Discount," were naturally to be expected in such a locality. Their advertisements were shown in the beer-shop windows—"Loans from £5 to £500," and all the rest of the time-honoured story.

The mothers, too, were at the public-house as often as their liege lords. On a Saturday night there were always several fights, and the police-station had many inmates on a Sunday.

A squalid, miserable neighbourhood, growing daily more hopeless as its outer aspect grew blacker. The poor, half-starved, struggling population fighting its grim fights with want, selfishly heedless of any other sorrow but its own. How many millions are there of such strugglers in as hopeless case! We find them in every young suburb, with the same sad faces and eager looks, fighting the same fight, —unhappy creatures whose births and deaths are duly noted in volumes kept for that purpose; and when the weary play shall be played out, whose good and bad actions will be weighed as carefully no doubt as those of their more fortunate brethren. Of whom the Recording Angel keeps as accurate an account.

And how fared Frank Pickering all this while? After so promising a start, had his progress been as encouraging?—had energy and perseverance secured to him a well-merited success? No, no, no,—by no means.

Frank Pickering's shop stood where it did; but it was no longer a post-office. There were no longer any pianos for hire; the stock of stationery had grown scanty; some of those well—too well—selected works of fiction with which he had started a year ago, yet hung upon the shopkeeper's hands unsold—it had been found advisable to "go in" instead for cheap newspapers, the broadsheets of crime,

the pictorial police news, and the most blood-thirsty of the penny serials.

The book-binding branch of business had collapsed. Something sickly in the sweet-stuff way was carried on; Fireworks were vended; As far as one box of cigars and three dummies went, the tobacco trade might be said to exist.

But there was a too evident blight upon the whole affair. The very flies seemed to know it; they settled down upon the dead-stock as vultures do upon the carcase of a desert camel. There were sad and solemn echoes in the bare shop and the empty house above. The melancholy tink-a-tink of the shop-door bell called forth a grim-faced female from the back premises, who looked as though she were attending her own funeral, or the funeral of the dead-stock.

As a rule, at this mausoleum of unlikely ventures they were out of everything anybody wanted. Intending customers fled precipately, refusing all offers of having what they had asked for sent next day from town. They could procure what they wanted twenty yards off at another shop.

But how was this? Only a year had passed away since that extremely energetic young shopkeeper, Frank Pickering, leased the premises. What had become of him? who was the grim-faced female? The grim-faced was no relation of his. Frank Pickering was far away. Over the shop-door his name had been painted out; the name of Walker filled its place. Unhappy Walker! he or she—for Walker might have been the grim one—had come

to fight and fall upon the battle-field where the fallen Frank had found his level previously, for Frank had failed too—very miserably.

The numberless houses of the nameless street were numbered now; the street was named; it was called a road—Great Something Road, only there was no Little Something Road to contrast with its greatness. And it led nowhere. The brickfield, now deserted, was yet unbuilt on. A new church was talked of, and would be erected directly the funds were found; but the subscriptions hitherto had been small.

The corner house, where the Whitakers had lived, was now occupied by another family, who let lodgings in a wholesale way, or wanted to, and had cards of "Apartments Furnished" in wellnigh every window. Mrs. Whitaker was dead, and nobody knew what had become of her daughter or of the dark gentleman with the beard from foreign parts.

A person inquiring after them six months after they went away—a person who had been a member of Mr. Bradshaw's congregation—inquiring out of curiosity—could find no trace of the name of Whitaker in the neighbourhood. There seemed to have been a terrible panic in the commercial circles, and almost every shop had changed hands.

"They must have been before my time," was the general answer.

One, however, hesitated. "Whitaker—Whitaker," he said, "was that the name of them as bolted from No. 2 in the terrace?"

"It was either Whitaker or Wilkinson," said this person's wife.

The questioner never got nearer to a solution of the difficulty.

The way Frank Pickering made the acquaintance of Harry Draper, Esq., was this:—Draper came in one night for a sheet of paper and an envelope. He wanted to write a note, for which he also wanted a bearer. An idle boy being at that moment standing outside the shop-door, Draper called to him, and bade him carry the letter to its address.

The fact of the idle boy being Pickering's property, however, necessitated the asking of Pickering's permission, and this being graciously granted, it naturally came about that Draper waited for the answer in Pickering's shop.

While thus waiting, a conversation took place between them. It appeared that Pickering was to a certain extent acquainted with the person to whom the letter had been written; the person's mother visited there. Thus Pickering was of necessity taken into Draper's confidence—at first, somewhat to that gentleman's disgust; afterwards, because he was a willing and useful person, and existing circumstances required the employment of secret agents, and of much mystery and machination.

As business was in a flat and unprofitable condition, Frank had a good deal of spare time upon his hands, and as he had also motives of revenge to prompt him, he lent his aid willingly to what he thought neither Mrs. Whitaker nor "that mean humbug, Jarman," would approve of.

We find then that Jarman was a mean humbug —at any rate, in his old friend Frank's opinion. Now, how was this? You may remember that day when James renewed Frank's acquaintance, the former made some proposition regarding funds to be found for a likely spec. Frank's conclusions as to Jarman's meanness arose out of this circumstance.

Frank had found a spec—several specs, all of which he was prepared to prove were extremely likely ones. There was but one absolute necessity to ensure the brilliant success of any of them, and that was a rush on the part of the public. Failing a rush of the public—of which James in his pig-headed way seemed doubtful—there was just a faint probability that a good deal of money might be dropped.

"But everything's a risk," said Frank.

"So it is," said James.

And then the conversation began to flag.

Undoubtedly the finest investment for James's money proposed was that it should be lent to Frank to do what he liked with in his business. The safety of this method was so great, the security offered so desirable—strictly personal, or if James liked it better, a friendly bill of sale over the goods at three times their value. By either of these methods, as Jarman could plainly see, he wonld avoid all trouble and anxiety.

Somehow, though, Jarman would not look at things in a proper light.

"I don't see how the money will help you," he said, after glancing over Pickering's books.

"Don't see how it will help me?"

"No. This neighbourhood's worth nothing for trade. It seems to me like a quicksand to you unlucky shopkeepers."

"Yes, yes, that's true enough," cried Frank, catching readily at the notion; "a fresh start is what we want—a fresh start in a fair field. Something on a large scale."

"What?" asked James.

When many hours had at different times been passed in consultations and negociations upon this subject, Frank began to despair of ever getting hold of the money, and then he lost patience and grew very angry.

"I was a fool to expect anything else; but he surely ought to give me something for all the precious time he has made me waste. Not he! I shan't get a penny-piece."

"It's very unkind of him," said Mrs. Pickering.

"Never mind; I shall do without his help, I daresay. But I must say one thing."

"Well, dear?"

"It was deuced bad luck that that fellow should have stepped into my shoes in the way he did, and gone and made a fortune in Jamaica, while I have been working my heart out for nothing in this brute of a country."

"So it was," said Mrs. Pickering, in all good faith.

Awhile after another idea occurred to the unhappy shopkeeper, which to some extent lightened his spirits.

"I've one thing to thank him for. He helped me to break off that absurd engagement with that girl of the Hicksons."

Mrs. Pickering, who could not quite follow this part of the argument, asked for an explanation.

"If I had gone away then, ten to one I should have returned before the year was over and married her. As it was, happily, things went otherwise."

He ignored altogether the part that the Captain O'Grady had taken in marrying Evelina, or the part that Evelina had taken in throwing Frank off entirely of her own free will. Half a century ago Johnson prosecuted Jackson for kicking him publicly. We read the case to-day in an old newspaper, and five minutes afterwards are quite hazy as to whether Jackson were prosecutor or defendant. What does it matter now to anybody but Johnson's or Jackson's descendants, and perhaps not much to them?

There came a time when the affairs at the fancy repository got into a very desperate state, and then Jarman, humbly solicited, assisted with a loan of twenty pounds. But other loans had previously been effected, notably with the Judas Iscariot and United Vultures, and then followed writs, judgments, and executions, and other legal unpleasantness.

Harry Draper was appealed to among others.

"What do you propose doing," he asked, smoking

his cigar while he spoke, "when you've smashed up?"

"What I can, I suppose," said Pickering, glumly.

"Open another shop, and go another cropper?"

"I don't know."

"If you were instead to get some settled salary, would not that be better? A clerkship in some Government office?"

"There's not much scope for ambition there," said Pickering in an injured tone, as though he had been, say Napoleon the Third, and had been offered the governorship of Jersey.

"But then it's a certainty."

"Have you any influence?"

"A little. I happen, by the greatest chance, at this moment to know of something. The salary is not large, but the work is light. You might employ yourself to advantage after office-hours. I need not, to a man of your talents, Mr. Pickering, point out the way. What say you, now? and if a friendly loan of twenty-five pounds is of any service to you, you can pay me back any time when you're able."

"What is the place?"

"It is in a registrar's office. A registrar of births and deaths and—and marriages."

2.

Far away from Straggleton New Town and its shabby gentility beneath a bright blue sky, facing the open sea, from which the salt breezes blew into its open windows on glorious summer days, stood Number One Paradise Row.

The Paradise Row aforesaid was at a little bathing-place east of London, which the reader may christen for herself, Whilkington-super-Mare, Shingle-shore, Sandstone, or by any other fanciful appellation, as it is the custom of modern writers to name their localities—as perhaps the present writer would do also on this occasion, only all the names he can think of have been used before.

Has not, for that matter, a sea-side town been described over and over again—humorously, pathetically, and in the guidebook style? Yet if it has, there seems somehow always a sort of freshness and sea flavour about each description. It is what we call the winter season when these lines are being written. The leaves have fallen. A muggy, wet day, dull and sunless. It requires all one's powers of memory to recall the dead-and-gone summer, when sun shone and the sea rolled in at our feet upon the sands.

Ah, how blissful was existence at What's-its-name-super-Mare, during love's young dream—when the world was fresh and warm—when there was not the least possible doubt upon earth that everything would go on thus gaily ever more—that love would grow stronger the longer it lived, and that every-body was to be happy ever afterwards by special contract with Providence.

In those delightful days, surely, the face of nature showed more lovely than it ever did before or since. The women were much more beautiful, and the men more handsome; and the fashions prettier and more becoming. How the glorious old sea rolled in too, with his frothy crown! and how the coy nymphs fled at his approach—not fast enough, however; for he always caught them—the boisterous old fellow—in his wet embrace, and smothered and tumbled them mid screams and scrambles.

How white the houses looked with the glare upon them! and how green the blinds! How the children laboured at their everlasting excavations on the sand! and what strange fatality awaited their tubs and spades! The rascals at the shops must been in league together, and hired sharp-eyed knaves to lie in wait for the toys at all seasons.

How the donkeys galloped!—poor donkeys! they would much rather have walked, or better far, stood still and eaten their dinners. How the heavy maidens on the donkeys' backs squealed with fear, and yet liked it! How the young ladies with literary tastes persevered, to the exclusion of all other cares and objects in life, in their novel reading! How those

clever at their needle stitched! How the rest flirted! How all their skirts and ringlets, and wet back hair, fell in turns into the power of the raging wind, which ravaged the little town on rough days from end to end, carrying away after every visit a large spoil in hats, caps, and the like articles.

These rough days, but more especially wet days, were fatal to What's-its-name's hopes of keeping its visitors; for at the first threat of foul weather coming, boxes were packed and trunks corded, and lodgings deserted even at a sacrifice; and the up-trains filled to overflowing. But the new married couple at Number One cared not the value of a brass farthing what weather it was; for the sun of love was shining: and in their eyes all Nature wore a joyous aspect, and smiled through her tears—that is to say, the rain.

Some women are many men's idols, and some have but one love to boast of. Perhaps the women of one love are loved the more passionately. Then, again, it is a question whether it is not best for a loving woman to be only half loved, than to be loved desperately and only half appreciate it. Did the husband love the wife in this particular case as much as she loved him? The landlady scarcely thought it possible.

"She's a sweet creature is Mrs. Draper," the landlady said. "And, oh! how she do doat upon that good gentleman of hers! It makes me quite young again to see 'em."

She in her time had doated upon *her* good gentleman—doated still just a little; but his was not a

responsive nature. That was the landlady's good gentleman sitting on the iron railings opposite, with his back to the sea, smoking a pipe and staring his wife's lodgers out of countenance—an ugly blot of man, dropped, as it were, right in the centre of a pretty picture. That was Mr. Starkey.

Oh, those were such happy days spent in the airy drawing-room of Number One! Such a bright young face peeped out from among the flowers on the balcony! Such merry laughter echoed at all times from the open window! The male passers-by envied Draper not a little. The females looked on critically: with some disapproval even, and suspiciously.

There was a certain style and air about the young bride which was not thoroughly approved of by the other lady visitors at this little watering-place. There were large numbers of unmarried ladies who tossed their heads and sniffed the air at her approach.

"An actress, or something of that sort," they said; and one of the other lodgers one day asked Mrs. Starkey the landlady whether she was *quite* sure the persons upstairs were respectable.

Nobody could have behaved more like a gentleman than Mr. Draper. Even the landlord, who did not usually take a hopeful view of things, owned to this. He was a perfect gentleman, and parted with his money without a murmur: paid all that was asked of him, and asked no questions in return.

"Poor girl!" the landlady said one day to her

husband. "I hope it is all right, for her sake. How she loves him! He'd be a bad lot if he treated her unkindly."

"Ah!" said Mr. Starkey.

He was not sentimental, nor was he very curious upon the subject, not exactly seeing what more he was to make by the business even if he found out whether the young couple upstairs were all they should be, or the contrary. Being one day, however, by accident, near the drawing-room door without his boots, he was not above taking advantage of the circumstance, and applied his ear to the keyhole. Then he heard this:—

"My darling Harry, how happy you have made me! I was not worthy of being your wife. What could you have seen in me? I often ask myself. But you did see something. Do you know, sir, it is three months this very day since we were joined together in holy matrimony at that funny old registrar's office?"

"How do you know the time so exactly? You have been looking at the certificate?"

"Oh no, I haven't. There was no occasion. Do you suppose I shall ever forget the date?"

"What made you think it wasn't right?" the landlord asked his wife half-an-hour later.

"It was not me thought it. Some one said so."

"They were fools. It's all right enough."

"So I said. At any rate, there's the ring all right and regular."

"And the certificate."

"Have you seen it?"

"No. I'll have a try, though, if I get a chance."

The landlady was not kinder or more attentive after this discovery. It would have been difficult for her to be so. She had taken an immense liking to the young bride; and gave her and her husband much more than their share of the attendance—leaving the other lodgers to shift for themselves.

But she was very happy indeed to know that it was "all right," as her husband had termed it.

"Poor dear!" she said. "It's a cruel world—a cruel, hard world, for anything of that sort. It's very odd, though, I don't quite believe in her good gentleman. Even now I don't half like him, for all his fine words and handsome face."

It was rather amusing how each of these couples —Mr. and Mrs. Draper, and Mr. and Mrs. Starkey—should respectively have objected to the male on the other side. Mr. and Mrs. Draper objected very much to Mr. Starkey.

One day Mrs. Draper said—

"What trade is your husband?"

"He isn't in trade, ma'am," said Mrs. Starkey, with some hesitation.

"Not in trade! Doesn't he do anything?"

"Oh, lots of things, ma'am, in the way of help."

"Is he helping now?" asked Draper, with a smile, pointing out of window as he spoke to Mr. Starkey's figure, as usual perched upon the rails in front.

Mrs. Starkey coloured, and was a little angry.

"We can't always be hard at it, sir," she said.

"You are, though, generally."

"Well, that's because it's my way, sir. I like it."

"He doesn't, I suppose."

"He has a right to do what he chooses, sir, I suppose, if he can get money enough—honestly," said the landlady; and flounced out of the room with the breakfast things.

Even a casual observer might have been inclined to think that Mr. Starkey was not of a very industrious turn; he was so very often seated smoking on the railings before mentioned, or basking in the sun on the pier, or drinking at the bars of the several public-houses.

He was currently reported to be an educated man. He had been something in the commercial way; and he had travelled. He was looked upon with some respect at the public-houses, where he was a good customer. He was of a cynical turn, and discussed local topics contemptuously. He was understood to be Liberal in his politics. His motto generally was, Down with everything—more particularly church-rates!

He wanted to know what was the use of a pack of parsons! Why were they to be fed and pampered? Who fed and pampered him—Starkey?

One day some one said—

"Why, the missis, don't she? She's al'ays a-toiling, and a-slaving, anyhow; and if it ain't for you, Mr. S., who is it for?"

Besides Down with the parsons! Mr. Starkey's

motto was also Down with all Cockneys! It is true that he had once been a Cockney himself, and had come from London and settled down permanently upon the little watering-place. He did not particularly object to resident Cockneys. It was the visitors—the excursionists—the tag, rag and bob-tail, as he called them—coming down in a mob, turning everything topsy-turvy; putting folks out of their way; giving all sorts of trouble for precious little profit.

His listeners shared these sentiments heartily. The husbands of all the landladies, to a man, were of Mr. Starkey's way of thinking; and objected, with all their might and main, to the people out of whom they lived.

All of them—hotel-keepers, cab-drivers, boatmen, bathing-machine proprietors—seemed quite agreed upon this point. They would be much better without the Cockneys. For instance, see how nice and quiet it was in the winter-time, when the inhabitants of the town and the north-east wind had it all to themselves!

The wives, who stopped at home and worked the flesh off their bones, as the saying is, did not altogether share in this opinion, for they did not see how they could get on if there were no season, during which the money for the winter-time could be earned and put away.

But yet in the dead time only was there a chance of rest and recreation. The womenkind every now and then, after the season was over, went out for walks, by way of recreation, and looked at the

wonderful sea—wonderful because it could form an attraction to draw Cockneys by the thousand down to look at it—more wonderful still, because the Cockneys' chief delight seemed to be to wash themselves in it.

What a notion, the residents thought, "to wash out of doors in cold salt water, and dress and undress in an uncomfortable, wet box upon wheels, and pay money for the privilege of so doing!"

"It's a hard life," Mr. Starkey would say sometimes, after spending a long summer's day smoking his pipe and watching the tide in and out. It's a sad thing to have to work when every one else around is idling, and lounging, and dreaming away the busy hours. I shall be glad when we've put by enough to chuck the whole thing up, and settle down and rest our bones."

He was resting his poor bones at the time upon the iron railings.

"Look at those beggars now in our first floor! That gal and her fellow! What are they, I should like to know, that they should roll in the lap of luxury, while I am content to pick up the crumbs that fall from their table?"

"Good big crumbs some of 'em, ain't they, Mr. S.?" asked the friend in whom he was at the time confiding.

"Perhaps so," replied Starkey, a little angrily; "but they're not large enough either. Never mind: I'll set my claws in a big swag some of these days, I hope. I hate this humdrum, hand-to-mouth work,

I tell you. I want to make my money a little quicker."

"That's what most of us want," said his friend.

Mr. Starkey said no more, but scowled ominously. His friend could not help thinking it would not have been quite safe at this moment for a weaker man, carrying a good round sum of money, to have met Mr. Starkey in a dark and lonely lane.

3.

How happy and careless that young girl was! Her book lay open on its face, thrown down and left where she had been reading it. The flowers she had meant to put into water were lying faded by the empty glass. The piano stood open. Her hat lay on the dinner-table: her shawl and scarf—one on the sofa, the other on the back of a chair.

That morning she had intended to get up early—to practise a good hour at her music—to finish reading that first volume, for which they had already asked her twice at the library—to do a score of things all wanting doing badly: but here was the day three-parts over, and nothing done at all.

Oh, days of early love! If there were forty-eight hours in each of you, and one hundred and twenty minutes in every hour, would there be time enough? Of course there would not. There never had been such happy days as these in Ann's wildest imaginings. Such dreamy days of endless billing-and-cooing, beyond which, as it seemed to her, there was no happiness to wish for.

What a delightful place this little watering-place appeared in her eyes! She could almost fancy sometimes that the whole thing was a sort of play played there for her amusement! There were the gaily

dressed young ladies—the band—the crowd. The sea itself, perhaps, specially engaged to roll and tumble beneath the warm sun! The music of that time ever after haunted her memory, and brought back to her, when she heard it, glimpses of the old dreamland from which the sunlight had faded, leaving all dull and bleak. Then there came quite vividly before her eyes, the fresh white houses—the green blinds—the blue sky—the restless sea—the crowded street—the hum of voices which Death had hushed.

He must have loved her at that time, she thought. He used to call her pretty; and so indeed in her youth and happiness she was; although it was by no means the beauty of a *Keepsake* heroine. At that remote period of English history were worn neat linen collars and cuffs, and black-and-white striped dresses, and black leather belts with big buckles. Leather boots too were in vogue, with heels two inches high at least. It was also the custom to wear petticoats elaborately embroidered, frilled, and tucked.

Crinolines had quite gone out of fashion in civilized circles, but were adhered to loyally by the humbler orders, who did not think it looked respectable to be without them. Those who knew what they were about wore their frocks cut with gored skirts, and with just room enough to sit down in them with a few creases.

The hair was worn piled up upon the crown, and pulled down over the forehead, sometimes in little fluffy curls, sometimes straight, with trimly-cut ends;

the latter style being known as the "Jack Sheppard." If possible, it was worn golden. At any rate, it was very little pomatumed, and worn as light-coloured as could be without the use of dye.

The ladies, just at this period, we see—the monstrous whalebone and wickerwork epoch at an end—were not quite so overflowing and boisterously aggressive in the matter of petticoat. This was a slim and supple period, in which the iron barriers that had kept the sexes apart had fallen down for awhile, and lovely woman seemed—always, be it understood, consistently with the strictest rules of propriety—generally more cuddleable.

How busy she was, too, this Ann of ours, although she did nothing whatever. It was her duty to make the tea in the morning, and she never by any chance was in time to do it. And then the pouring out; what a process was that! It somehow happened—Mrs. Starkey must have done it on purpose—that everything was always on the other side of the table, and when she was obliged to reach over Harry to get the articles she required, he used to hold her there in a half-flying attitude, like a fairy alighting, and kiss her.

During all the length of that memorable honeymoon, she did not half a dozen times remember to put sugar in his tea; and when she did, she on those occasions sweetened it twice over. She used to lock up a variety of drawers and boxes, because Harry said it was the proper thing to do; but then she used to leave the keys lying on the corner of the mantel-piece, or on the centre of the table, so

that there was not much security in this mode of proceeding.

Mr. Starkey had a way of looking into the lodgers' rooms when they had gone out for a walk, and sometimes he lost nothing by these little visits. There were odd cigars lying about, which had evidently been forgotten, and these, if hidden on the ground behind a sideboard, might be produced if inquiry were made, or taken away altogether if there was no inquiry, next day. The same with small coins and other trifles.

Mr. Starkey found it well worth his while to go upon these little tours of inspection, and, indeed, to keep his eyes open, as he called it—meaning at key-holes and such-like places, against which he also applied his ear when he thought he was likely to hear anything to his advantage.

Mrs. Starkey meanwhile worked away as hard as she could work, and found the days too short to rest in. But she never grumbled because Mr. Starkey took things easily. She had married a gentleman, she said, proudly, and she liked him to act as such. He acted as such accordingly. He took his rum-and-milk in a morning before breakfast. He ate heartily from the lodgers' tables. Then he took his lounge, and his cigar or pipe. Then his gin-and-bitters. Then his early dinner. He was not so selfish as to stand out for a late dinner, because he knew this would have been inconvenient for Mrs. Starkey; but he was very particular that everything should be served up nice and hot.

Of an evening he mostly used the parlour at the

"Admiral Benbow," where he was treated with respect. It was, "Good evening, Mr. Starkey. How do you find yourself by this time, sir?" and other courteous salutations greeted his entrance, to which he replied calmly and with dignity.

Sometimes he took a little more than was good for him, and then some of the other gentlemen saw him home, supporting him by the way. Then Mrs. Starkey, who was sitting up for him watching anxiously, would open the door, and entreat him to come in quietly and go to bed without disturbing the lodgers. Occasionally he complied with a good grace, and proceeded as gently as his unsteady legs would allow to his sleeping apartment; but sometimes he would assert his right, as a man and a Briton, to make what noise he thought fit in his own house, and he had been even known to challenge objecting lodgers to come forth and try the question by single combat.

One day, when the happy couple had gone out upon the sands, Mr. Starkey accidentally looked into the apartment, and found that Ann had left her desk open.

There was nobody by. It was an opportunity that really ought not to be thrown away. He took a chair and sat down. First he looked to see whether there was any money or trinkets stowed away in its compartments, but there was not. Instead he found a ragged little programme of a performance at the Boudoir Theatre, very carefully wrapped up in several folds of paper.

Then he found some letters, which he read. They were mostly very short ones.

"My darling—I am waiting; can you come?"

"I am here, my own love; can you come?"

"Do come, if only for a moment, dearest."

"They're very loving, though they're uncommon short," said Mr. Starkey. "I should say by the turn of them, too, they're written by some one who didn't want to compromise himself more than he could help. There's no signature."

He looked them through again, and then returned them to the envelope from which he had taken them.

"Dearest! my own love! my darling!" He smiled grimly as he repeated the words. "They're as easy to spell as any other. There's a genuine sound about 'em, I suppose a woman thinks, when they're addressed to herself. How silly they sound though to a third person, or to a court full of third persons when they're read out by the counsel on the other side."

There were several other papers of a private character—memoranda of events and payments, which Starkey designated 'bosh' after perusal; and then, wrapped up carefully by itself, he found a large official-looking instrument—a copy of a marriage certificate between Harry Draper, bachelor, and Ann Whitaker, spinster.

"Ah! here," said Starkey, "are the celebrated lines. At a registrar's office. Witnesses, John Brown and Mary Squires. It would seem, then, from the paper that the relatives of our young turtle doves

were not present. Why was that, I wonder? I suppose they did not approve."

With this reflection he put away the certificate where he found it, and as he fancied he heard a footstep approach beat a retreat.

4.

Mr. Starkey lit one of his lodger's cigars, and took a stroll along the esplanade. It was very hot, and the parlour of the "Benbow" looked cool and shady. He dropped in for a glass of cold punch—it was the afternoon time—and finding he had the room to himself, lay down upon the sofa for a nap.

The sofa stood in the shadiest corner of the room, and in front of it was a screen, pasted over with many pictures. The window was open, and there was, Mr. Starkey fancied, a slight draught. He was very susceptible of cold, for he had spent some years of his life, and considerably impaired his constitution, in one of the hottest parts of Jamaica. He therefore rose and pulled the screen more round him, and then dropped off to sleep.

He had not been slumbering very long as it seemed to him, when the door of the parlour opened, and two persons entered. He recognised the voice of one of them at once.

"Will this do?" said Harry Draper. "We're alone here. What on earth are you so mysterious about?"

"I couldn't speak before her," said another voice

—one he did not know, but the reader has already heard tell of its owner—Tom Yolland.

"Is it a secret?"

"That's for you to judge when I have told you. You are just simply a devilish lucky fellow, Draper. You always were, though. You were always confoundedly idle at everything, and yet always pulled it off. I'm one of the sort who are always hard at it, and hard at the wrong thing."

"Well!"

"Well. You asked for a consulship some months ago, and you gave the thing up as hopeless because the appointment did not come to you by return of post."

"Of course I did. It ought to have come."

"Well it has come after a short delay. You've got what you asked for. I had it from a man in the Foreign Office. You'll receive the letter to-morrow or next day; but I thought I'd like to tell you the good news myself, so I ran down to see you."

"It was very good of you. Where is it for? Did you hear?"

"The consulship? It's for the place you wanted. I suppose about one of the best ports there is. With your connexions you will have the entrée into the best society. You may make a brilliant marriage."

"Yes, yes," Draper replied, impatiently. "Who the devil would have supposed that such a thing would have happened after all this delay?"

"It's nothing to grumble at though, now it has come."

"I don't know that. I think I shall refuse it."

"Refuse it! Never!

"I have got other plans. I have made other engagements——"

"Come Draper, be reasonable. I can understand what you mean, but I am sure she is too sensible to stand in your way if she cares anything about you. Between you and me, Draper, who know the world, do you believe these actresses have really any heart except for their profession? She'll see things in the proper light."

"You don't understand. She wont see it at all. It's not nearly as easy as you think."

"She'd never want to go too. That would be too absurd. It would be impossible; it would be known directly, and your position would be a barrier to all hope of advancement."

"It's impossible!"

"That's what I say."

"No, no; I mean it is impossible to leave her."

"Why? Look here, Draper! One word. You're not really married."

Draper answered promptly and decisively, "No. Certainly not."

"And yet you say——"

"That it is impossible. Yes, because I love her."

The door opened here, and some one entered. The two speakers rose and left the room, and Mr. Starkey sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"What the deuce and all does that mean?" Mr. Starkey asked himself.

That night, in the same parlour, Mr. Starkey introduced marriage as a topic. The marriage ceremonies of all countries were discussed at length. A gentleman present who had travelled a good deal had some strange stories of what was done in foreign parts. Mr. Starkey and two other gentlemen had been married in church, and they related their experiences. A Mr. Watkins who was of the company had been married at a registrar's.

"What may you have to go through in that case, sir, if it's not taking a liberty?" asked Starkey.

Mr. Watkins was only too glad to give all the information in his power.

"It's not a religious ceremony like that at church," said he; "but you have to use a ring all the same. At least I don't think that matters much."

"Perhaps nothing matters much?"

"Oh, yes. There are ceremonies to be observed, and very particular ones. For instance, the door must stand ajar while the marriage is going on, and there must be four persons present besides the happy pair."

"But there are no prayers, are there?"

"There are very few words of any kind. The bridegroom says, repeating after the registrar, 'I give you this ring in token of my love and affection for you;' and the bride says also, repeating after the registrar, 'I receive it as such.'"

"Does she say 'as such?'"

"That depends who says it. I think it's generally 'as sich.'"

"However, that is all she does say?"

"Every word. The ceremony lasts about seven or eight minutes; but when it is over they are irrevocably united, to be parted only by death or divorce—or the workhouse authorities."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Watkins," said Mr. Starkey, as they walked away together, Mr. Wakins smoking a cigar, which Mr. Starkey had given from his case, "I am most awfully curious to have a look at a certificate of a marriage before a registrar. Do you think now Mrs. Watkins would consider it a liberty if I asked to look at hers?"

"I don't see why she should, Mr. Starkey; the more so as you are such a favourite. But come in with me now, and we'll ask her."

Ten minutes afterwards Mr. Starkey had the certificate alluded to in his hands and was examining it carefully. To all appearance it was very much like the other certificate he had looked at that morning. There was a number—in this case 96—and there was a page—page 48. He recollected there were number and page on the other one, and that in that case the page was 52.

Both marriages had taken place in London, the other one about two months and this ten years ago. There were here two witnesses, as in the other case, but in this case one was the bride's mother, and the other the bridegroom's brother. Mr. Starkey handed

back the document when he had mentally noted these particulars, and presently strolled homewards sucking at an unlighted cigar.

He came to a sudden halt in front of his house and took his favourite seat upon the iron rails. The drawing-room was lighted up. Ann was seated reading. Draper was pacing to and fro. After a turn or two he came forward and leant over the balcony. Mr. Starkey smiled.

"He's thinking it over, *he* is," said Draper's landlord to himself. "He don't half like it. Half like what, though? What the deuce does it all mean? Is there a marriage or isn't there? And what does it matter to me which is the case? Well, it matters just this much,—H. Draper, Esquire; it seems to me you're keeping the thing dark for some reason, and it's worth your while it should be kept dark for some reason. Now, in that case, you ought to pay for it. Oh no, my dear sir, I'm not above bribing. Don't mention it, I beg. I'm a poor man, who can't afford to be either virtuous or wicked without he makes something by it. Shall I make anything by the business, I wonder? It's hard to say; but it's uncommonly interesting in a small way, and I've plenty of spare time on my hands; so why shouldn't I go in for unravelling the mystery? By Jove, I will, too! I ought to go to town about my own law business; I'll kill two birds with one stone."

5.

When Mr. Starkey made his mind up to do a thing, he did it. Next day he went up to London, as he had determined he would over night, and he went straight to the registrar's office, and asked if he could buy a copy of his sister's marriage-certificate.

"What is her husband's name?"

"Draper."

"And your sister's maiden name?"

"Whitaker."

"Do you know when they were married?"

"About two months ago."

A search was made. "No one of that name has been married here during the last twelve months."

Mr. Starkey was much astonished, but there must be some mistake. "Were there no Drapers?"

There was a William Draper married to Mary Ann Edwards, but no person of the name of Whitaker appeared upon the register.

"It must have been at some other office."

"Is there another office in this parish?"

"No."

"I recollect one thing. It was on page 52."

Several pages of that number for various recent

periods were consulted. Hitherto a clerk had been looking; now the registrar himself lent his assistance.

"You do not recollect the date?"

"It was some time in June."

The registrar whispered to his companion.

"That would be page 52. It can't have been any blundering of that fellow Pickering's?"

"As he's gone, we can't ask him. But then, if it had been here, of course you would have checked the entry."

"To be sure," said the registrar, and then he turned to Starkey.

"You've made some mistake. It must have been in some other parish."

Here then the inquiry terminated for the present, and Mr. Starkey returned home out of temper.

"What the plague did I expect to find out? Why the dickens didn't I make sure which parish it was before I set out on this wild-goose chase?"

Once or twice during the journey he mentally repeated these questions, and felt very much disgusted.

"I do believe I expected to find out there had been no such marriage at all. Well, it seems as if that was what I have found out—that is, if I was right in the office. But how could that be? the girl couldn't be deceived. There must have been a marriage, and Pickering—I wonder whether it's the same Pickering, the friend of that damned Jarman? I'd like to have it in my power to settle accounts with both."

This Starkey, you see, was, in a small way,

quite a melodramatic villain—one of the sort with a life-long thirst for vengeance—only he was more like the villains of real life, and forgot his murderous purpose rather frequently.

Next day some startling events took place, and on the whole Mr. Starkey was more astonished than gratified.

Upon the sands at noon Draper met his friend Tom Yolland.

"Hallo, Tom! I thought you had gone by the last train over-night."

"I meant to have done so; but on second thoughts I stopped. I have seen her!"

"Her! Who? Ann? She has gone to bathe. Do you mean you have spoken to her?"

"Yes."

"What about? You never have dared?"

"How you talk, Draper. Come now; I know you better than you know yourself. Haven't you a thousand times expressed your sentiments—haven't you over and over again said no woman was worth being true to? Sooner or later you would have grown weary and left her—why not now? I need not repeat all I told you about your poor mother's law-suit. She will look to you for help now, instead of helping you. You must not let this golden opportunity pass by."

"Yes; I know all that—I know all I have said, and I'm ashamed of myself. Tom Yolland, I thought I was a rake—a profligate of the first water; I've always acted as though I were a villain, and I have

this time acted like a greater villain than ever; but I find I am a coward; I daren't leave her."

"What prevents you?"

"Nothing but that I am afraid. Did you say you had spoken to her, Tom? You don't mean that you have told her that—that——"

"I've told her you must leave her."

Draper drew a long breath. He was as white as a sheet, and shook somewhat.

"What did she say?" he asked, in a low voice.

"She consented."

Mr. Starkey, finding the coast clear after long watching, went upstairs to his lodger's room upon one of his little tours of inspection. That careless little girl had left her keys lying upon the mantelpiece when she had gone out to bathe. Mr. Starkey looked through the bunch, selected one, and opened the desk.

There was the certificate as he had last seen it. He took it out and looked at it long and carefully. The page was fifty-two, as he had thought, and he had not made a mistake about the parish. What did it all mean? Could the registrar and his clerk have overlooked the entry? That was not probable. There must have been some trick perpetrated, and the girl was the victim. Harry Draper had spoken truly when he said there had been no marriage.

And what was he, Starkey, to make by this discovery? While he stood asking himself the question, the certificate in his hand, the door opened without warning, and Ann stood before him.

But was it Ann? Assuredly not the Ann of a couple of hours ago, who had gone out singing as light-hearted as a bird; not the Ann he had seen so often smiling among the flowers on the balcony—the prettiest and freshest flower of the whole nosegay; not the Ann with the coquettish little airs and graces, the little pet words, pretty wheedling ways, soft pattings and purrings—*la petite chatte*, as *he* had loved to call her.

What Ann was this?

A woman several years older—dull-eyed, swollen and heavy—and with pallid cheeks, on which yet remained the traces of tears—with features which, in this brief time, seemed to have hardened.

But it was the same Ann, of course. There was the pretty shawl, hanging carelessly, a little crooked, and unfastened; there was the dainty little hat, the looped-up skirt, the frilled petticoat, the high-heeled boots; but the old air was gone. The clothes seemed somehow as though they no longer fitted her.

She started at sight of Starkey, uttered a low exclamation, sprang forward, and caught his hand in which the certificate fluttered. The rascal was too frightened to speak.

"What are you doing here?" she said. "Are you, too, one of his agents? Has he sent you in to steal it and destroy it?"

Starkey recovered some of his courage on hearing no mention of police.

"I was sent by no one. I want to be your friend, ma'am, believe me."

"My friend," she said, bitterly; "such as I am now have no friends. There, you may steal that thing, if you choose; you're welcome to it—it is only waste paper."

She turned from him as she spoke, and throwing herself into an arm-chair near the window, buried her face in her hands. The flowers hid her from the street. Starkey's eyes wandered stealthily from the certificate he yet held to the slight form trembling there, and back again. She looked round in a moment with flashing eyes.

"What do you want here?" she said; "why don't you go? I suppose I have the right to order you to go; this is my room yet—until he turns me out into the street."

"Don't—don't talk like that, ma'am," said Starkey; "it can't be as bad as that. Don't talk of turnings out; he mustn't play these tricks without paying for them. Make me your friend, and I'll show you how he can be made to pay."

"To pay!" she cried; "to pay for what? No; I wanted his love—nothing else. He has no money to waste on me. His friend has told me all—how his mother is badly off, how she will look to him for support, how——"

"Who was this Mary Squires whose name is written here?" Starkey asked, interrupting; "and the man? Who was present?"

"Nobody but the registrar, of course—Mr. Pickering."

"But there are witness's names."

"They were in the other room, I believe—I was told. But you know well enough. I suppose they deceived me in everything; I had no one to advise me! I was mad! It was a just punishment."

"No, no; you must not look at it in that way. It is a more serious business, this, than you or he think for; it may go hard with him and his accomplices if it becomes public, and I for one shall not keep the secret."

"What do you mean? Upon whose part are you acting? Did he not send you here?"

"No; I am acting as your friend, I tell you, and I mean that you shall have justice. He shall marry you in reality, and he shall pay me well to be silent, or——"

She hurried forward and endeavoured to possess herself of the paper; but he was too quick for her, held it aloof, and presently thrust it into his pocket.

"Give it me back!" she cried, struggling with him; "give it me back, or I will cry for help. You have no right to it; you shall not injure him."

"You will injure him if you make any noise," he replied; "because I shall tell the whole truth at once. It's a transporting matter for your husband, I tell you. Now, be cool and reasonable. I can manage it yet, so that he marries you. If it is properly put to him, he dare not refuse."

She turned away and burst into tears.

"Keep the paper," she said; "but you can do no harm, I am sure, unless I choose to speak, and

they should tear my tongue out first. Marry him!" she exclaimed, after a pause; "how low do you think I have fallen? What kind of pitiful creature do you take me for? I would rather die than marry him now! There, leave me for a little while, if you please. I want to pack up a few things; I am going away."

"Going away?" he repeated. "Take my advice—don't do that. Have you seen him since his friend told you everything? You must stop and see him."

"See him!" she said, with a sort of shudder, and turned wearily away.

Starkey left the room, and went thoughtfully downstairs.

"I ought to make something out of this," he said to himself.

She was left alone. How cold and desolate the room looked! The sun at that moment had hidden itself behind a cloud; the scene without was grey and grim; the smooth sea rolled sluggishly in upon and licked the shore.

There were the flowers she had loved. The little bird he had bought her sat silent in its cage, its eyes following her, as she fancied, mistrustfully. There, at the top of her desk, were his two or three love-letters she had treasured so carefully, kissed so often. She took them up now, and lighting a match, burnt them to ashes—without tears, without

anger, as she might have burnt any other commonplace scraps of paper, not these to which his burning words of love seemed to have given almost life.

"My love is dead!" she said, in a low tone; and again and again repeated the phrase—"My love is dead! It is all over! I must go!"

Go where? Here had been her home; she had been so happy here, so secure in the durability of his devotion—oh, how happy! What had these two or three weeks been like? A dream in a dream—a game of play; it had been a butterfly's life—a flower's life—and now she had served her turn, and had faded, and was left to die.

She gathered together such few odds and ends as she treasured most, and packed them in a nonsensical little carpet bag, and took up her umbrella and went out as though for a stroll. There was all the wide world outside for her to stroll in.

As she passed out of the room the sun burst forth again, and the little bird began to carol joyously; the soft zephyr from without wafted towards her the perfume of the flowers.

Then something within her breast seemed to labour painfully: was it her heart breaking, she thought? Her eyes filled with tears which blotted out the scene; she turned and hurried downstairs, and next moment was out in the road.

The old busy road, with its restless holiday folks hurrying or lounging on their way. The sands were crowded, as she had often seen them; the bands were playing, the sky was blue, the sea

sparkled. The old life as it had been going on before her for years—or only days, was it? She turned her back on it now, and walked quickly towards the railway station.

6.

When she had been gone about half an hour, Draper returned and ran lightly upstairs. He looked eagerly round the room, and then hurried into the bed-room beyond, and then rang the bell violently.

Mrs. Starkey came upstairs in answer to the summons; she looked pale and frightened.

"Where's my wife?" he asked. "Has she been in?"

"The lady's gone, sir."

"Gone! When? Where?"

"Gone a little while ago, sir—gone for good, I think."

"What makes you think so? What has happened? What did she say?"

"I didn't see her, sir; Mr. Starkey knows."

"Why the devil didn't he answer the bell, then?"

Mr. Starkey here put in an appearance apologetically.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said. Then in a less humble tone to the woman—

"You can go; you're not wanted."

When they were alone, he continued—

"The lady was very hurt and very angry—very

angry indeed. I tried to pacify her; but she would not listen to reason."

"Poor girl!" muttered Draper, in a low tone.

"Of course, sir, I saw at a glance how things were, and did my best. I think I persuaded her to take things more quietly."

"What did she want to do, then?"

"She talked of appealing to her friends, sir; but I did all I could to show her the folly of such a course. I told her——"

Draper burst into a passion.

"Who are you to tell her one thing or the other? What did you know of the matter?"

"Don't be violent, Mr. Draper," said the landlord. "Don't reject the assistance that was kindly meant."

"Appeal to her friends! I can't believe it. It is so unlike her. Appeal to her friends! What do I care for her friends?"

"I beg your pardon, sir; but if I might be allowed to suggest, her friends might give you a deal of trouble."

"Poor girl! It was quite natural she should be in a fury. How she must hate me!"

"Fortunately, Mr. Draper, I secured the worst piece of evidence."

"How long has she been gone did you say? I am wasting the precious time, when I might overtake her."

"Half an hour; but I think, sir, if I might suggest, before seeing the lady, you should be aware——"

"I have not a moment to waste now. There is a train goes directly, if I remember rightly."

"One has just gone. She probably caught that. If you will listen to me now——"

"Not now—another time. To-morrow—to-morrow week. I can listen to nothing, and think of nothing, until I have seen her."

He rushed out of the room and out of the house without waiting for another word, leaving Mr. Starkey somewhat disappointed. As yet that gentleman's negociations seemed likely to be anything but profitable.

What must he do next? He hardly knew what he was aiming at himself. Except that he was a scoundrel ready for any dirty work that might offer, it was difficult to say what might be the part that Starkey was presently to play in this little drama.

Meanwhile, Draper lost no time in reaching the railway station. A passing fly took him there as hard as the horse could gallop; but he was too late. A train had been gone about ten minutes. From inquiries made of the porters, it seemed that a young lady answering to Ann's description had been one of its passengers.

Without hesitating a moment, he entered the telegraph-office, and sent a telegram to a station a third of the way to town, requesting the station-master to be on the look-out, and deliver a message to her when she arrived there.

The message was—

"For heaven's sake, return! I will explain all."

Then he waited, having given instructions that the result should be telegraphed to him at once. In a couple of hours' time there came a reply. It was not written by Ann, but the station-master.

"I gave the lady the message."

"Is that all?" cried Draper; and stamped and swore with rage. When he was cooler, he sent another message back to ask what the lady said, and whether she had gone on by the train to town, or was coming back.

He waited to see the next train, which did not arrive for about a couple of hours longer, and he got the answer back still later. The lady had received his message—had said nothing—and had continued her journey. What to do next?

He wandered back towards his lodgings, and paused irresolutely before the door. Suddenly the idea struck him that, after all, she might have come back, and was waiting for him upstairs. In another moment he was in the room calling her by name.

It was twilight. The window stood open. A cold air from the sea fluttered a curtain in the inner room. He took it for the rustle of a skirt, and started forwards in excitement. But no; no one was there.

Then he stood irresolutely looking out of the window upon the water and the deserted sands. Then rang the bell. Mrs. Starkey came up to see what he wanted.

"Your husband?"

"He has gone out, sir."

"Where to?"

"I don't think he has gone far. He will be back soon to his tea."

Draper waited until he lost patience; then started forth in search of him, but searched without success. It had just occurred to him as not a little odd that his landlord should have been mixed up in the affair at all. How did he come to know anything about it? Probably he knew where Ann had gone to?

While he was looking for Starkey in the various inns, Draper chanced to notice a clock. The last up-train passed in less than five minutes' time. He would go up to town yet. Yes, he must go up to town. He could not rest here all night. He must see her before he slept.

There was just time to run up the Highstreet to the station, if the clock were right; and he did not waste another moment. He therefore abandoned the idea of looking for Starkey, and set off at a brisk pace. Half-way there, he saw another clock. If this one were right, unless the train was behind time, there was no hope of catching it.

He hurried on at full speed. Turning up the road leading to the station, he heard the sound of the coming train, and saw the red lights gleaming in the distance. At the same moment, the tinkling of the telegram-bell was faintly audible. As he rushed on, a hand was laid upon his arm.

"Draper! where are you going?"

It was his friend Tom Yolland.

"Leave go—damn you!" the other said, through

his set teeth. "This is all your work!" And he darted onwards.

The train was at the platform now; and Draper knew by experience that the door would be closed, but yet he tried it. Then he ran out again, and vaulted lightly over some palings dividing the station from the road.

The train was moving on again by this time at a rapid pace. He rushed forward, and caught at the handle of a door. There was a shout from the porters—a scream from a woman who saw what was taking place. He lost his balance but clung, and was dragged then, jerked off and—crash and smashed.

With a shrill shriek the iron monster went upon its way; and a little pale-faced crowd picked up the fallen man, terribly hurt, but yet living.

7.

When they carried Harry Draper, senseless, bruised, and bleeding, back to his lodgings, they found a large official despatch awaiting him, on the envelope of which was printed, "On Her Majesty's Service." It was the expected appointment.

Yolland took it up, and read the superscription somewhat ruefully.

"Curse the women!" he said. "What mischief they cause."

This Mr. Thomas Yolland was not a magnificent prodigal, like his friend. He had no private income, and was obliged to work hard. He was an author. He was not at all popular with the public —the public—except that portion of it which knew him personally—knew nothing about him at all; but yet he made between three and four hundred a year by his pen.

He had not a spark of genius, or a single original notion; but he wrote good English—"good Saxon English," they called it in the newspapers, when reviewing his magazine articles. He wrote for most of the magazines in, as it is termed, a popular style upon popular subjects—mild social essays, and wish-wash generally, all second-hand—

thrice-told stories, which were yet pleasant reading, easily waded through, and immediately forgotten.

The publishers spoke of him as a most reliable man—trustworthy, punctual. In an age of duffers, Yolland was much more likely to make his fortune than any of your mad-cap geniuses, intent on striking out new paths and starting on wild flights of fancy of a wholly unprecedented, and therefore impracticable character; who only once in their lives at the outside hit the public taste.

He was eminently respectable, was Yolland—wearing always a frock-coat of good cut, and throughout the summer a double-breasted white waistcoat. Trimming his whiskers very carefully, and abjuring all attempt at moustache. In his mild way, he thought his friend Harry Draper "a devil of a fellow!" Sometimes he thought him like a young prince in a fairy-book. He was much more like a stage prince—all dress, padding, and make-up!

Yolland was strong and broad-shouldered; but he did not take half the amount of violent exercise his friend did. It was a part of this sham Hercules' game of life to go in for extremes in everything; and his dumb-bells were some pounds too heavy for him.

He was indeed a miserable sham, this handsome youth; and his life seemed threatening just now to wind-up with a dismal failure. The doctor, summoned in haste to the railway station, had felt the patient's pulse, and shaken his own head.

"He hasn't got strength enough to bear a long

illness," he said. "If we're not very careful, he'll go out like a rushlight."

Tom Yolland saw his friend put to bed, and sat down by the bedside to think what he should do. His presence in town was not absolutely necessary for some days at least. He could very easily do his work down there, and send it up to London by train. He therefore wrote to the laundress instructions for clean linen, &c., to be forwarded immediately, and made himself as comfortable as could be.

Harry Draper raved during the night, and called again and again for Ann to come to him. Once he was for getting up to go and catch the next train. Tom Yolland thought this conduct highly absurd, and finding that his arguments were useless, lost all patience.

"Hanged if I don't leave you," he said, "if you can't be a little bit more reasonable."

In the morning Draper was calmer, and later on they talked the matter over.

"What has become of her? Where has she gone? Perhaps she has destroyed herself!"

"Not she," replied Yolland impatiently. "Not at all likely. She saw it was all over between you, and I daresay had some one else in view."

"That I swear she had not," cried Draper. "You do not know her—how she loved me."

"No," said Yolland, "I don't."

Later on again, Draper cried out remorsefully—

"What a wretch I have been! What have I not to answer for?"

"There's no doubt you acted very badly," said Yolland; "but I suppose it is not the first or the last case of the kind in the world. We must take care she does not want. But she has a small income of her own, has she not?"

"All my life I have been a wild and heartless libertine," cried Draper, melodramatically.

"Your beef-tea is ready," observed Yolland, in his prosaic way. "You're not to have it too strong;" and so Don Juan sat up with some groaning, and took his spoon food.

This portion of the sad story is not pleasant writing and can hardly be agreeable reading. One does not like to see one's hero down and grovelling. Men do not like women to know how poor and paltry, mean and pitiful men can be: and women are all idol worshippers, and wont believe any such nonsense. No, miss or madam, it is wholly untrue what is above written. We are all grand creatures, virtuous and noble, or splendidly wicked! Such as you see us, with your loving eyes, are we ever! There is no deception!

"I'm afraid it's all over with the consulship," said Yolland. "What bad luck! I wish I could only get such a chance!"

"You shall write a letter for me to-night to the head of the office, explaining that I have met with an accident. I dare say it will be all right."

"Had I not better write to your mother?"

"Not till we hear a little more from the doctor.

It will only alarm her; besides, she might take it into her head to come and see me."

"Well?"

"I don't know who might be here."

For some days it seemed as though the injuries resulting from Draper's accident were to be unattended with any very serious results. The letter respecting the appointment having been answered, leave was obtained for a reasonable time, and Draper's general health appeared good; but this state of things was doomed not to last very long. Some indiscretion brought on an unfavourable change, and it became, Yolland thought, absolutely necessary that Mrs. Draper should be communicated with.

Up to now the sick room had not been always so dull as it might have been, although Ann's presence had faded from it like a ray of sunlight. It fortunately happened that the great Jason Burgoyne, little Addleton, and Charley Skylights, members of the Rough Club, had come down for a lark to the little watering-place, and put up at the Royal.

These gentlemen dropped in and partook of Draper's cigars and claret-cups, and enlivened him with their merry prattle. Jason one day, not knowing how matters stood, asked carelessly—

"Seen any more of that woman whom the parson fellow ran away with? She really had her notions. I've got something in a new piece of mine that she is just cut out for. I wish you'd drop a line for me, Draper, and tell her what I say."

They were gay dogs these, and laughed and

quaffed and consumed large quantities of tobacco in various shapes.

"Of a morning, the place stands a end with the smoke," Mrs. Starkey said. "I can't think it's good for the sick gentleman."

It was not good for the little bird Ann had left behind her. In fact, one morning after the gentlemen had been merrier than usual, and stopped later overnight, it was found lying dead at the bottom of the cage.

It was either the tobacco smoke, or the obstinate nature of Draper's internal injuries; but from whatever cause, his case got very bad indeed. The merry gentlemen, when they went away, discussed his ailment in the smoking carriage during the journey up to town.

"He's played out is poor Harry."

"He hadn't the stamina for the life he led."

"If he led it?"

Then there was some merriment. They laughed at anything these hilarious dogs—except adverse notices of their own works in the newspapers.

8.

At last Draper's case seemed desperate. He had lain in bed more than three weeks and was as weak as a rat. He grew light-headed, and Tom Yolland got frightened. Yolland was required very shortly in town. Who, then, was to take his place at the bedside?

He was uncertain as to Mrs. Draper's address. She lived abroad, and changed her residence pretty frequently, following the progress of the fashionable world and the swallows. When consulted, Draper could give no reasonable answer. The only way was to search in his desk in the hope of finding the address upon some scrap of paper or at the top of one of the lady's recent letters.

The idea of overhauling his friend's private affairs was somewhat repugnant to Yolland's feelings; but what was to be done? His friend was quite delirious, and the case was urgent. He therefore unlocked the desk and searched.

Oh what a desk! There were photographs and locks of hair put away in envelopes, and labelled "Clara," "Blanche," "Leonie." There were letters in women's hands, numbered and tied up in small parcels; some of the hands were not as good as they might be, and even at a passing glimpse it was easy

to see that the spelling was as wild and hopeless as their love had been for this gay deceiver.

There were besides a few bills settled and unsettled, and among them one from the manager of the Boudoir, curious enough in some of its details to be worth while quoting. It ran thus:—

	£	s.	d.
"Contract for the use of theatre for one night and supplying theatrical dresser, band for one night's performance, wigs, 300 tickets, door-keeper, livery man, fly-keeper, two rehearsals, and cleaning the theatre (six ladies for minor characters included)	11	0	0
Extra Rehearsal	0	10	0
2nd Rehearsal, 5 pints Bitter Beer, 19 bottles Ginger-beer and Soda-water at 4*d.* per bottle	0	6	4
2 decanters of Sherry	0	4	0
Prompter	0	5	0
Leader of Band attending Rehearsal .	0	3	6
Full Band, ditto	1	10	0
Cash paid for procuring an Actress from Dramatic Agent and Cab hire . . .	1	4	0
13 bottles Lemonade and Gingerbeer .	0	4	0
18 persons to Supper at 5*s.* per head .	4	10	0
12 bottles and 1 pint of Sherry, at 4*s.* per bottle	2	10	0
Beef, Bread, Pickles, and Porter, *For Boots at the Swan*	0	1	0
	£22	7	10

There was also a collection of autographs from various persons, famous and notorious, of whose acquaintance Draper boasted a little in a quiet way, all pasted in a book; and there was some artfulness displayed in the arrangement, for only a few letters were there in their entirety, and it was just possible that some of the others had not really been directed to Draper himself. A sceptical person might indeed have been inclined to believe that even here, in his desk, there was observable some striving after effect.

It was surely scarcely probable that when Draper made this collection he had said to himself—

"If anything were to happen to me this is what I would leave behind—materials maybe for my biographer. What will my biographer say when he sees them? 'Here are the odds and ends of the gay, witty, and wicked Draper! His was a good heart spoilt. He was not without many noble qualities. He was undoubtedly clever—nay brilliant; but a shameless scapegrace. His was a perverted genius! He had much to answer for!'"

But it seems almost incredible, does it not, that any one should be so weak. Since the days of those shallow rogues and overrated impostors, the Gallant Highwaymen, men have not carved their own epitaphs on "Newgate stone" or elsewhere, and poséd and mouthed in their dying hour like actors at the play.

Yolland, good simple fellow, took exactly the view which the biographer was to take, supposing the absurd theory given above to have had any foundation in truth.

He was both shocked and dazzled, but presently he found a letter which set him thinking.

It was one that Draper must have overlooked, for there could be no grand effect got out of it. It was from his mother, and Yolland had not the slightest intention of reading a word, had not the first line so surprised him that he involuntarily scanned the contents of the first page.

"My dearest Harry—So you are going to marry Miss Ann Whitaker, are you. Very well. May you be happy. I am sure she must be a sweet girl, and of course you love her very much. She may not be rich, and her family may not occupy as high a position as my Harry ought to expect, but what then?——"

Here the letter went over leaf.

What then? Tom Yolland could not help feeling desperately curious. What could be the meaning of such a letter in the face of the facts of the case.

"I must know how matters really are," he said to himself, after a moment's reflection, "or I shall be bringing about some tremendous quarrel between Harry and his mother."

And with this recollection he read on.

"Therefore, my dear boy, if you love the young lady, for goodness' sake marry her. If I could manage the journey, I should so like to be present at the ceremony, but you know what a wretched invalid I am. Anyhow, if I cannot come, I suppose I can bless you both from a distance. And now, with respect to this miserable law business, please

go at once to that lawyer man in Furnival's Inn, and say exactly these words——"

The next two pages were wholly of a legal character, and the four succeeding filled with gossip relating to the society at the watering-place in France from which she dated.

"What does all this mean?" Yolland asked himself in wonder. "She did not object to the marriage, and I am certain Draper was in love with the girl. There could not possibly have been any obstacle. Why, then——"

Why, then? He was asking himself the same question some hours afterwards, and was as far as ever from any reasonable solution of the difficulty. There was, indeed, only one solution, and that was so outrageously absurd and unlikely he could not believe in it.

For the mere sake of keeping up his ridiculous reputation as a magnificent libertine, had he perpetrated the famous old mock marriage of romance, and perhaps broken the heart of the woman he loved. Love, though! What could such a melancholy jumping Jack of a hero as this know of love?

Yolland turned towards the bed, and contemplated with an expression not far removed from contempt, the pale, delicate face lying there. He was thin and haggard with his illness, and the other for the first time thought that there was a certain meanness and insignificance about the features of his friend, handsome though they were.

He wrote a letter that night to Draper's mother,

telling her that her son was in a critical state, and begging her, if possible, to come instantly after receipt of his communication, as he was obliged very soon to return to town about his own affairs. Somehow it all at once occurred to him that he had wasted quite enough time by the sick man's bedside.

He waited three days, and then an answer arrived. Mrs. Draper was in the deepest distress at the dreadful news. She sincerely trusted, however, that things were not as bad as Mr. Yolland would have her believe. Unless there was a change for the better, she must really beg of him to write to her again at once. Being herself in a most precarious state, she would not undertake the journey if happily there were a favourable change. Otherwise, of course, she must.

"Pray," said the lady in conclusion, "consider a mother's feelings and write by return."

Yolland threw down the letter in disgust.

"Write by return," he continued. "If she were at all anxious she would say—telegraph."

Then he took an uneasy stroll to and fro in the room, and asked himself what was to be done next.

"I can't stop here," he thought, "and yet how can I go away and leave him in this pitiful plight. The doctor says he is a little worse to-day—may be much worse. I must say I don't think it at all fair that I should have the responsibility of his dying on my hands."

Eventually he determined upon an energetic course of action.

"I've three clear days I can spare; hang me if I don't fetch that old woman by force, for I do not believe she is any more ill than I am."

9.

Tom Yolland found Mrs. Draper in the French town, in lodgings up the High-street, not looking very ill, but groaning pitifully. She moved here in a small circle of English society, and was much looked up to.

It was a poor little shabby-genteel society at best, much the same as that Mr. Percy Fitzgerald describes so ably. There were a dowager lady of title, a baronet, and an honourable as stars, and some twenty families, all more or less in straitened circumstances, who found the French coast cheaper than the English one.

At the same time in the town was a mob of Parisian lions and lionesses, very rich and extravagant, who led a wild racketty life, at which the English looked contemptuously. There was a Russian princess among other notabilities, who changed her toilette four times a day, each change being more gorgeous than the last; and there were many others—grandes dames and cocottes, whose dresses were surprisingly rich and costly; but this unbridled luxury did not urge the British maids and matrons to similar displays, for with the generality of travelling English a certain frumpishness of attire is de rigueur.

They, instead, looked and marvelled perhaps in their heart of hearts, as the lady novelists say—envied a little, but they outwardly affected contempt, and some of them honestly entertained the feeling. Until the crack of doom many worthy Britons shall thus despise all foreigners—the French more particularly—and they will never believe that the nobles of any other than a certain island which shall be nameless, are aught else but mush-room-like impostors, whom "any of our people, sir, could buy up, ten times over, root and branch, and never miss the money."

When first the visitor was announced, Mrs. Draper evidently mistook the name, and took Yolland for quite another person; for by the time she found out who he was, she grew gradually more and more ailing. It was very much after the fashion of the sham cripples, in that ridiculous ballet where the soldiers come in search of recruits, and the able-bodied villagers feign various ailments to escape the military glories awaiting them. Don't you remember how the rogues, when they thought the danger past, casting aside their slings and crutches, were dancing merrily, and how the recruiting sergeant and his men, returning in the middle of the jig, laid their hands upon the impostors' shoulders, and how the latter gradually, and by almost imperceptible degrees, resumed the crippled and distorted attitudes of five minutes previous?

A savoury smell pervaded the entire house, and even while Yolland was there the French servant

came blundering in to tell madame that she was "served."

"Dear me," said the lady, who was savagely hungry; "I could not eat a morsel to save my life, but will you stay and dine?"

The stupid man did so, and the unhappy lady endured a small martyrdom in front of the dishes she could not touch. He did not eat much, having so much talking to do. He tried his best to persuade her to return with him to England; then demonstrated, almost rudely, that it was her duty, and the least she could do under the circumstances. At last he went away, inwardly cursing the "heartless wretch," and next day returned to England alone.

His sojourn in this, a foreign land, was therefore a brief one—scarcely two clear days; but he must have picked up an immensity of information during his short stay, for after that date, and solely upon the strength of this flying visit, he became a great authority upon all subjects connected with foreign life, social and domestic, politics, and political economy.

He came home in a most despondent mood, and was particularly sea-sick. When he reached little What's-its-Name-super-Mare, he found that some strange events had occurred during his absence, and that his services as sick-nurse were no longer neces-

sary.

10.

The generality of London residents get into a sort of way, when they have lived some years in town, of thinking that there are only certain districts where it would be possible for them to exist. Some districts lie low. The air in others is more smoky. Some are so deadly lively. No person "with any sort of style about them" could live in others.

And yet London is densely populated in all directions. Who are they, for instance, one might well inquire, who live down those dismal old shabby-genteel streets, and black and gloomy squares, lying between Gray's Inn-lane and Tottenham Court-road? The houses are large. The rents of some of them must be high, but what a neighbourhood, cut off from fashion and fresh air! What a death-like silence in some of the grass-grown no-thoroughfares. What a dismal look-out! and what a maze of ill-smelling back lanes and alleys surrounding the short-cuts from this sepulchre of lethargic respectability to the busy haunts of men beyond.

There are some streets round about this quarter where the appearance of the houses reminds one of canvas theatres at a fair. Without we have the imposing entrance, the Corinthian pillar, the flight of noble steps, the massive scraper, all holding forth

delusive hopes of a corresponding scale of splendour within, which the first glimpse of the dirty bare boards of the lobby is doomed to dispel.

Within is quite a little colony. Lodgers on every floor—two on a floor, for that matter. A colony of desperately poor and hard-worked people, who have little time or inclination to fraternize. Here single bed-rooms are let to single men—a strange race, coming in late and departing very early in the morning—going no one knows whither: vaguely supposed to be "in the city."

There are also very lonely single women fighting a hard battle with fate, and struggling for every mouthful of food. These are, if anything, more mysterious than the single men in the nature of their callings; and not unfrequently have no calling at all, but are on the look-out—waiting with wan, anxious faces, which grow every day more wan and anxious as the hope dies within their breasts.

At such a house, up such a back street, lived such a lonely woman who called herself Mortimer, but was, in truth, the Ann Whitaker of the previous chapters of this history. Here she had been living about three weeks; and had been trying very hard, and had failed very often, and was growing a little heartsick and weary.

She had come to town, not caring what became of her; and buried herself, as it were, in this melancholy neighbourhood, abandoning herself to despair, praying for death, and wondering how long it would be in coming to her relief. But after a day or two of such bitter misery, that ever more the

traces of its passage across her fair brow were visible in the tiny lines faintly but indelibly stamped there, better thoughts came, and she began to ask herself why she should die, and whether there was not still something worth living for.

It seemed to her, then, that the thing worth living for was the stage, where, perhaps, she might make a name, and win fame and fortune, if she got the chance.

"I will never love any one again," she said. "I will, till I die, hate all the world. But I will succeed without help. Yes, before I give in, I will work the flesh off my bones."

There are many brave and resolute young hearts who have said as much and begun as hopefully. How many go forth to battle every day and are left slain upon the field? The story is as old as the hills. We cannot all be successful; but at least we can all, as we are bound to do, strive to succeed.

Ann was not without means. Her mother's income was hers; but as yet she had not touched it. It had been left in trust of James Jarman, and without communicating with him she could not draw any money. The marriage had been a secret one, at Draper's desire, and she had obeyed blindly. Once she had said—

"I must let James know, must I not?"

"Why?" Draper asked, coldly.

She wanted to let him know that she was married. She had at the time acted more like one in a dream than in her waking senses. The reason for

the mystery she had never asked herself. She followed blindly Draper's directions.

Her mother had been buried about three months. James Jarman was absent in the country, where the success of some speculation he was engaged in required his presence. Without any one to take care of or advise her, seeing scarcely a living soul but the man whom she loved and trusted in implicitly, it was no wonder he persuaded her as he chose. We all know how very differently, and with what superior wisdom, we ourselves should have acted had we been in her place—particularly now that her melancholy example lies before us. Now that the dream was at an end, and the stern and hopeless reality stared her in the face, she saw what a fool she had been to believe the preposterous romance he had conjured up for her deception.

Alone in the world—cut off from all hope of respectability, as it seemed to her—branded and disgraced—how dare she now face James Jarman?

"I will starve first," she thought. "I will work unaided. Others have done so before me."

She set to work hopefully. She called upon several metropolitan managers, and stated her case. She found many other persons anxious for an audience, and loitering round the stage-door. She found too, that as a rule, a young, well-dressed, and good-looking woman—(are not "well-dressed" and "good-looking" almost synonymous terms?)—obtained more easily access to the Presence.

The London managers she found to be pleasant spoken and affable. They were in want of every

sort of talent but her talent. They asked her what she had done before, and were sorry she had had no stage experience, or they had something which might just have suited her. Some offered her a glass of wine and a biscuit, and expressed a wish that she would favour them with a call if ever she was passing that way.

She came from the theatre sometimes after one of these interviews quite light-hearted and smiling sweetly. The poor shabby folk, yet waiting for their turn—a turn which sometimes never came—nudged one another and grumbled. They thought, to use their phrase, that she had "pulled it off." But it was not so. Ere she reached the street corner, the golden vision vaguely shadowed forth in the good gentleman's gracious remarks had already begun to fade away. After all, he had made no definite promises. She was, in fact, just as far off being an actress as ever she was.

When she had tried the west-end managers, she turned her face towards the east. She had once been to an east-end theatre, and had laughed heartily at a tragic drama there performed. It had seemed to her that nothing could be much more absurd than the play itself, and the way it was played. There was a ridiculous nobleman, who wore the same pair of Hessians throughout a long life of crime, extending over fifteen years and four acts!

This same person had a way quite his own of strolling up and down Fleet Street without his hat. There was another, who said, "Here's a go!" instead of "Years ago"—and who told interminable

stories to help on the plot. The women were wretchedly ugly, and ill-dressed, and vulgar, she thought. The management of such places, then, must only be too eager to snap up any available talent and beauty.

Strange to say, though, they were not. These people seemed to live in a small world of their own, which the four walls of the theatre bounded. They spoke of west-end stars familiarly, with an abbreviation of their Christian names, and pooh-poohed their worth.

"Bob Diamond! Bah! Had him here, and paid him a heap of money. Didn't bring me half of it back again. I've a man here of my own who could knock him silly in any of his crack pieces."

One manager was not quite sure something might not be done for her.

"What will you pay?" he said.

"Pay! I have no money."

"Oh, dear me. And your friends: have they none?"

"No."

"Oh, dear me. Well, I should advise you to give it up. The stage is not a fit place for any lady. You'll find it a life of great drudgery. You had better go down to the country, I should think, and work hard for the next five years."

"And then?"

"And then go on working; unless somebody by accident comes down and sees you, and offers you two pounds a week to take the lead at one of the west-end houses."

Ann drew down her veil to hide her tears, and took her departure.

She tried the agents next who advertised their power to get engagements, and paid certain fees, and had her name entered with great formality in certain books, but nothing came of it.

Mr. Mantrapper was very sanguine at first. He leant back, and looked at her with a thoughtful air. He said—

"Bless me! What a likeness! Is it Farren or Furtado, or one of the Moores? Your voice is just like Vestris's was. You can sing and dance, of course? I wish you were in the acrobat way now. I've a splendid opening for a female Leotard at the Little Orpheus. Could put you on directly."

Ann timidly expressed her views. She was not particular what it was she did, as long as it was not the flying trapeze. Mr. Mantrapper took his fee and entered her name.

After this she called several times and paid some more money; but nothing had turned up that was likely to suit her. Her small capital was almost exhausted. Sometimes of a night she grew frightened when counting up her slender resources. If something did not turn up soon, what was to become of her?

"Ah!" said Mr. Mantrapper, "if you were regularly one of my pupils, you know, I could manage it all easily enough. Why not join my class, and begin in the right way? I guarantee an

engagement as soon as ever you are perfect—and that will be very soon, you know, if you will work."

"What are the terms?"

"Five pounds a quarter, paid monthly in advance. What do you say?"

"I—I am afraid I cannot afford it," she stammered; "and you promised to get me an engagement without that."

"Not quite promised, I think; said I would if anything turned up. I can't make vacancies, you know."

"But supposing I joined your class, how would you get one for me?"

"Oh, that's different."

"Why so?"

But Mr. Mantrapper did not explain.

At last, however, there came a letter to say that there was an opening. She dressed herself very carefully, even invested in new gloves. She made her poor pale face look its prettiest, and tripped light-heartedly two long miles through the rain.

"Oh, it's you," said Mr. Mantrapper, coming out from his back room hastily, and displaying but little enthusiasm at sight of her. He had indeed been expecting some one else, some one he was waiting for to bring him some money.

"Yes," replied Ann, very graciously; "you wrote to me."

"I wrote—my clerk wrote—yes. Ah, that's filled up!"

"Filled up!" she grasped.

"Yes; you're too late."

"The note came by the last post last night."

"Ah, these things come and go in a moment; one ought to be always on the spot."

"And I have lost it, then," said Ann, in a trembling voice.

"Yes; lost that, anyhow. I'll tell you what I'll do for you, though: there's an opening in the ballet at the Great Sahara—it will be twelve shillings a week to begin with. You shall pay me half the first six weeks, and I'll ask for no more; I wont be hard on you."

"Me!—the ballet!" the girl said, with a flushed face."

"Why not? You've nothing to do; you'll be on the spot, too, in case anything else turns up."

Ann's rage was too great for a moment or two to allow her to reply. Then, as she bowed and moved towards the door, she said—

"I will not trouble you again, Mr. Mantrapper."

"I shan't be sorry for that, ma'am," Mr. Mantrapper observed, when the shop-door had closed between them.

11.

THINGS were beginning to wear an ugly look. Ann had changed her last sovereign. Her clothes were shabby, her boots worn out. The unusual fatigue of the last week or two had overtasked her strength. The cold and exposure were beginning to tell on her. Her cheeks were very pale now, and somewhat pinched.

"What will become of me if I do not get the engagement very soon?" she asked herself. And supposing she were to get it, what could she do even then?

There are in all poor neighbourhoods certain good Samaritans who are willing to take charge of even the most trifling articles, and lend their owners the market value of the objects mortgaged. Here, over the same counter, the patrician jewel and the plebeian flat-iron make each other's acquaintance, probably to their mutual surprise.

Here its over-sanguine wearer leaves a watch for just five minutes, and returns never more. Here are warm overcoats deposited upon the eve of frosty weather setting in, with promises that they shall be fetched away again directly, and an extra fee paid for "the drawer," so as to save time when they are fetched, and to avoid the creases. But the frost

sets in, endures long, and breaks up for spring, and yet the drawer holds its contents; and somewhere in another sphere, out in the wind, the coat proprietor makes the best use of his arms and legs to keep life in him, and pretends he is quite warm enough.

Ann could see one of these establishments from the window of her bed-room. The legends of its painted doors and its golden symbols were quite familiar to her. She did not go there, for she thought it "too near;" but took a long walk in search of some other place less public. It was a very long walk before it was finished, and the shop she fixed upon at last, perhaps, more publicly situated than many others she had passed by.

Even when she had made her selection, and hastily entered, after casting a frightened glance around, she went in at the wrong door, and was obliged to come back again into the street, and go in at another, her cheeks flushing with shame; for she thought the whole street was occupied solely with her and her affairs.

The proper door found at last, and a trembling bargain made, she came out again into the street with downcast eyes and hurried steps, as though she had come forth from a prison with the prison stamp upon her, and was anxious to mix with and lose herself in the crowd. Before she had gone far, however, a hand plucked her by the sleeve. She turned and saw Frank Pickering.

She was so amazed at his daring to speak to her after the part he had taken in the base treachery

Draper and he had practised towards her, that for a moment she was speechless. Then she thought perhaps he did not yet know that she had discovered all, and waited with some curiosity to know what he was going to say; while with a rapid glance she took in the details of his personal appearance.

Mr. Pickering's outward man was decidedly shabby. His coat was tightly buttoned up upon a greasy and ragged satin scarf; but at the corners close to his neck glimpses were obtainable of something of a very shady nature in the shape of flannel shirt, from which it was to be surmised that Mr. Pickering did not wear linen. His collar, which was a paper one, was much worn at the edges. He had on one dilapidated kid glove, and swung another, probably more dilapidated still, by one finger. He was generally threadbare and shiny and white about the seams. His hat was very glossy, in consequence of a recent drenching. He smoked the fag end of a cigar.

"Ah, I beg your pardon. How do you do?" he said.

She drew back and stood motionless staring at him. Then she saw by his eyes that he knew she had found him out. He went on as though she had accused him.

"I should like to have a few words with you, Miss Whitaker, about this business."

She blushed deeply at the name. It was so long since she had been called Miss Whitaker.

"I'm very much ashamed of myself," he went on, "for the part I took in it. I really am; but I

was in his power, you know. I was so hard up, and he had lent me money. I begged of him again and again not to ask me to do such a thing. It wasn't fair of him to take advantage of his power over me! It was a great shame!"

Ann still said nothing. What could she say? She turned away in silent disgust and hurried on quickly. In another moment Pickering was by her side. His boots were in a melancholy condition with regard to soles and heels, or rather perhaps with regard to the want of them, and he came upon her almost noiselessly, with a shuffling, sliding movement.

"You wont bear me any ill will in the matter, Miss Whitaker?" he pleaded. "I have suffered too —I have lost my situation. I have been awfully poor; I haven't tasted food for the last twenty-four hours. He has been a villain to both of us. I could tell you how to be revenged on him, if you'll promise not to pull me into the job too. I've got my way to make, you know, and can't afford to have my name pulled in. I expect to go into a business directly, which is a dead certainty to turn up trumps, and if it does——"

She came to a sudden halt and faced him, again.

"Will you please to go your way and let me go mine? I neither want your advice nor assistance. You have injured me enough as it is. Be content."

He dropped behind shamefacedly, as she thought,

and she went on at a quicker pace; but presently he was again at her side.

"You could not lend me a few shillings for a day or two?" he said. "I really wouldn't ask you, but I am so hard up. For the love of God do so if you can! You know my poor mother—she used to be so fond of you—she is waiting at home expecting I shall bring in something, and I have not a farthing in the world."

"I have no money to give," said Ann through her teeth.

"Oh, don't say that. If it is only a six-pence. You must have something too. I saw where you came out of. If you could spare me a shilling. I give you my sacred word of honour——"

She gave him a shilling, which he turned over with a dissatisfied look.

"Thank you," he said. "You can't do any more, I suppose? Very well. Thank you all the same. Where do you live? I'll bring it you back on Thursday."

"No. 10, Plantagenet-place, Burton Crescent. But never mind. Don't bring it to me; I don't want it. Good-by."

"Good-by," he said, smiling, and shook her hand before she knew what he was about.

With tears in her eyes and her face aflame, she hurried on and got rid of him this time. Turning at the street corner to take a last look at her persecutor, she saw him entering the swing door of a public-house.

And now things were beginning to wear an aspect which daily grew more seriously alarming. She was already somewhat in arrears with her rent. She had one by one parted with her little stock of valuables. Her clothes were poor and shabby, almost too bad to go out in during the day.

She would not have now been too proud to accept a place in the ballet had she been able to obtain one; but it was too early for the Christmas engagements, and just at that time business at the theatres was very slack. Of course she had tried to get on at a country theatre; but there had been only one opening with salary, and there the money was far from sure, and the travelling expenses, without mentioning wardrobe, &c., very heavy.

At last she came to the conclusion that without money or friends it was impossible to get on unaided—a conclusion at which any person of experience would have arrived long ago. What then was she to do? She owed money now, and it was absurd any longer to allow her pride to stand in her way. She must communicate with James Jarman, and beg of him to take the necessary steps to enable her to draw the little income to which she was entitled.

She wrote a letter, and awaited the result.

Three days later, no reply having come, she was asking herself what course she ought next to take. She made a weary pilgrimage to Straggleton New Town, and made inquiries. Jarman had gone away, leaving no address. She made other inquiries

in various quarters, but with a similar result. Then she remembered that he was a member of the *Roughs* Club, and thither bent her steps.

She found the place with some trouble, and asked for her cousin. He had not been there for several weeks. He was supposed to be away in the country or abroad. As she turned away with despair in her heart, a light-haired gentleman of a florid complexion, and very gaily dressed, came singing up the steps. It was Jason Burgoyne, the author-actor, with a companion.

"Tra-la-la, tra-la-la," he sang, staring hard at Ann through her veil. "Have I the pleasure, or am I mistaken?"

"How do you do, Mr. Burgoyne?" Ann stammered, in some confusion. She was ashamed of her shabby clothes.

"Ah," he replied, "I was sure I knew your face—a—somewhere—at the—at the——"

"The Boudoir."

"To be sure. I was going to say the Boudoir. Been acting lately in any more of Addleton's pieces?"

"I have not been acting lately. I have been trying to get an engagement somewhere; but I am afraid—without friends——"

"I don't know why that should be, I'm sure, but so it is; and yet I am positively starving for talent—positively starving."

Ann thought to herself, if that were the case,

here was talent positively starving for him. Why did he not take her?

"You want a chance—that's what you want," continued Burgoyne, as though making a great discovery. "You have the genius, and want the bringing out. You know some men on the press now, I daresay?"

"No."

"Your relations will pay something, I daresay?"

"I have been trying to do without that."

"Of course you have, but you can't reasonably expect to make a success out of genius pure and simple. Genius in a garret, my dear young lady, must have very powerful lungs indeed to make known its whereabouts. Fact is, we don't want genius now-a-days, do we, Skylights?"

"No; it's scenery, and scissors and paste. You ought to know."

Jason blushed, but laughed.

"You're right there. Judicious selection, eh? What's the good of those fellows who cudgel their brains for originality? It's wasting precious time; it's doing nothing. Careful arrangement, with an eye to dramatic probabilities (quite a different thing to real life probabilities, my dear sir), and stage effect; polish and finish. Then effective posters; and you'll live in a grand house on the proceeds. That's genius doing something. There's less laurel-wreath; but in other respects the results are more substantial."

With this Burgoyne ran up the steps, laughing at his own wit. Ann looked after him blankly.

"If ever there were an impostor," said Skylights, as he walked away;—"but there's one comfort—he knows I know it."

Ann returned home. What on earth was she to do now? She sat down in despair. The landlady knocked and asked for her rent. She would like it next day, or, she was sorry to say, she must thank Miss Mortimer to leave the lodgings.

Heigho! what an old story is this! But the story of human love, grief, passion, misery—have not all possible and impossible changes been rung upon it again and again since the arts of printing and authorship were first invented?

Here is our Ann in the same pitiful plight in which countless heroines have found themselves placed before her, and of course the same old threadbare denouement is approaching. At the eleventh hour there is to be heard the sound of horses' hoofs upon the roadway without, and the prince's voice clear sounding above the din of the raging tempest, bidding her be of heart, as hope and help are near at hand.

Worse luck, the writer of this history has not got a prince on hand, or a galloping steed, or a raging tempest ready; but is compelled to state that the rescue happened in a less romantic fashion:—Ann, left to herself when the landlady had taken

her departure, reviewed the condition of her earthly belongings very dismally. She had nothing in the world to pawn except the clothes she actually wore, and her purse contained—one penny.

12.

THERE are so many wonderful pennyworths now-a-days. Literary pennyworths, which would go a long way towards papering a moderately sized room. Toy pennyworths, looking as though they must take a week of honest hard work to manufacture. Then a penny loaf at a cheap bread-shop, or a pennyworth of pudding ("spotted" is not it called?) is as filling a pennyworth in the food way as could be desired. Coals are to be bought by the pennyworth in some neighbourhoods (you may carry them away, if you like, in your hat or coat-tail pocket). As far as clothes go, you can anyhow buy a collar and pair of cuffs for a penny. Towards housekeeping, when you want to begin, a penny will buy your gridiron, or your pokerette. With regard to amusement, see what is offered to you—there are penny readings (only they generally cost upwards of twopence), there are tragedies and pantomimes at the fairs, wax-work, wild beasts, Albino ladies, living skeletons, giants, and what not, all to be seen for one penny.

But how to spend your last penny in the world—that was the difficulty in Ann's case! She was faint and weary, but she did not want to buy any

food; she did not want any amusement, or clothes, or coals, or aught else that a penny could purchase. Her plight was a desperate one—a penny would not help her over her troubles. At least, she thought not—but it did.

She made up her mind to make one last, desperate effort to find something to do, and resolved to go out and buy a newspaper. Therein—who knows—she might find a situation which would suit her. She hardly knew what; but she was hopeful. In most situations for women—notably, a scullery-maid's—an unimpeachable character is strictly necessary. For a tragic actress a character is not of such moment. Perhaps there might be a tragic actress wanted somewhere.

In a shop near Burton Crescent resided a little sallow-complexioned old lady, who kept a small library and sold periodicals. Of her Ann made inquiry; but found that the penny newspapers that day were all sold. There was, however, a higher-priced journal, which she could read for a penny, and this offer Ann readily accepted.

It was a large journal, containing several pages of advertisements, and as Ann looked down column after column, without finding anything at all likely, her heart grew heavier and heavier.

The old lady seated behind the counter at her needlework, peered through her spectacles at the sad young face of her customer, and seemed not a little interested in her proceedings. At last, with a sigh, Ann folded up the paper again and laid it down, and while she took out her purse, her eyes still

lingered on the print, but the tears rising to them dimmed her vision.

The little old lady's spectacles meanwhile were peering into the purse, where the penny stood out conspicuous in its loneliness. When Ann would have laid her money on the counter, she laid her hand upon the girl's arm.

"You've not seen anything that will suit you, my dear," said she.

"No—nothing," Ann answered, in a low tone.

"Then you must not pay me, my dear. I shouldn't like to take it. There, there, put it back."

And Ann put back the penny without thanks. She could not speak just at that moment.

She leant her hand upon the counter to steady herself, for somehow she felt a little giddy; and, bending her eyes upon the paper, bit her lips. And while she stood thus, strange to say—at this critical moment of time, when her future happiness or misery were trembling in the balance, through her tears she read, as though in letters of fire—

"ANN WHITAKER! If still in London, pray call without loss of time on Mr. Dadson, Solicitor, No. 2, New Inn."

A moment afterwards she had hurriedly pulled out her penny and thrust it into the old lady's hand.

"God bless you for your kind words," she cried. "It is all I have got—all. But I have found something now. God bless you!"

And she was gone; and she and that old lady

never met again on earth; but the latter often told the story.

"I was sitting as I might be here, ma'am; and she stood as you might be there, and says I . . . . . and says she . . . . ." And so on.

Ann knew where New Inn was situated; and all the way there she repeated again, and again, and again, the name of Dadson, Solicitor, of No. 2. She was not very long in performing the journey, and reached the office just as a clerk was lighting the gas.

She feared that Mr. Dadson would have left his place of business before she arrived; and was inexpressibly relieved to find that such was not the case. But Mr. Dadson was engaged. Would she take a seat. She took a seat, and waited as patiently as she could.

There were two clerks shut off by themselves in a sort of pen—an old man and a young one. The young one was still lighting the gas. He was of a playful nature, and in a sportive mood. He made the gas flare up suddenly, and then turned it as suddenly out.

"What are you doing?" the old clerk asked, peevishly. "What's the good of larking?"

"Who's larking?" the young one retorted.

"Come, come," said the old one, angrily, "light up, will you? I want to get my work done, and get off home."

Some more practical joking with the gas followed after this, and another remonstrance; and then the

two clerks went on with their work. Ann listened to the ticking of the clock, and read the particulars of some sales by auction, the bills of which were wafered against the wall. They were all sales which had taken place long ago.

The young clerk began talking.

"How long's the old boss going to be to-night, do you think?"

"How am I to know?"

"Who's in with him now? The same party?"

"Of course he is."

"I hope he pays Dadson well for his time. He takes it out of him in that particular, don't he?"

"Yes, rather."

"He's been here twice a day at least for the last six days. I never knew such a fidgety beggar."

"Hold your tongue, can't you?" said the old clerk, and the pens went on scratching for some time without interruption.

"What does he want to find her for, I wonder," the young clerk began again. "There's a fortune hanging to it, perhaps. I wish some one would advertise for me."

Ann listened eagerly; but no more was said. The old clerk presently passed over to his young friend a paper which he wanted read aloud. In a droning voice, then, the lad began to read, and Ann heard a confused murmur of long words and long sentences, which seemed to her to have no beginning or end.

It was a weary time she had to wait, and she

was very anxious. But yet she did not complain. Here in this office was her only hope. What was beyond?"

She grew impatient at last; such a long while had passed, and yet her turn had not come. Was it possible that they had forgotten she was there, and had allowed Mr. Dadson to go away for the day without seeing her? He might have gone out by a back door.

When she reflected upon her desperate condition, this thought frightened her, and laying her hand upon her heart to stay its throbbing, she rose unsteadily to her feet. But at that moment a door opened at the end of a passage leading from the office, and footsteps were heard approaching.

"That's Mr. Dadson, I think," said the young clerk, and she turned to meet him. It was Mr. Dadson, a small grey-haired man, but there was another figure of a man behind—the figure of a man with a beard.

"Ann! Ann! At last!"

The figure behind had rushed past the little lawyer, and James Jarman held her in his arms—held her close to his heart—and kissed her pale face again and again.

"Why did you not come before?" he asked, breathlessly. "I have advertised a hundred times and more. I have searched everywhere. That vagabond Pickering gave me the address you told him. Number One, was it not, Plantagenet-place?"

"No," said Ann; and she gave the number correctly.

"At any rate I asked at every house for you by your own name, and—and his."

"I took the name of Mortimer," said Ann.

"Then you have not given up all idea of the stage?"

"No, I——"

"You chose the same name you acted under that night. A name he chose for you, was it not?"

Mr. Dadson here interrupted somewhat impatiently—

"Perhaps if you would step into my private room, madam. In case any client should drop in."

The two clerks chuckled slightly at this. In truth the scene was scarcely one which could strictly be called official. As it was, Mr. Dadson had had a good deal of trouble in managing the eccentric Mr. Jarman's business. Certainly he had not bargained for this dramatic passage.

In Mr. Dadson's private room some, comparatively speaking, rational talk ensued, and arrangements were made for the future.

"You had better go to-night to a respectable hotel," James said. "Here is some ready money. I will call in the morning and give you the necessary authority to draw any sums which you may require in future. If you really wish to carry out the idea about the stage, I can be of service. I happen to know that Burgoyne could find you an opening at once."

Ann related what had occurred.

"I can manage it, I think," said James.

That very night, in the smoking-room at "The Roughs," he found Burgoyne in conversation with a slim, sharp-featured man, with a great quantity of wild wiry hair—Charker, the manager of the T. R., Yokeltown, where Burgoyne's new piece was to be produced, by way of testing its capabilities for the London stage.

"You asked me a week or two since for the address of the young lady who acted at the amateur performance at the Boudoir," said Jarman. "You wanted her services."

Burgoyne exchanged a glance with his friend the manager.

"That's true enough; I did."

"I have found her now."

"Yes; I saw her myself yesterday."

"Well?"

"I'm afraid now the chance is gone."

They talked for another ten minutes upon the same subject, and then the conversation had reached this point.

"If her friends would be willing to help her now?" said Charker.

"With a sort of entrance fee of say fifty pounds," said Jarman. "Would you pay her a salary then?"

"A salary! That would be impossible."

"Not if her friends made it a hundred? In that case, you might pay her five pounds a week for a couple of months, don't you think?"

And all three gentlemen laughed heartily at this droll way of putting it.

When Jarman called next day on Ann, he told her that she was engaged to play a leading part in Burgoyne's new picce, "Autumn Leaves," which was to be produced three days hence; the reason for her performing so important a part at so short a notice being, that the lady who was to have acted the character had suddenly fallen ill.

"It's a splendid chance for you," said Jarman. "Are you satisfied?"

She pressed his hand in reply, and he hurried away to make a host of purchases which he said were absolutely necessary. She also had to work very hard; for she must leave London at latest by the midnight express. Charker came to see her, and his opinion upon the whole appeared to be favourable.

"You're not very strong, are you?" he said.

"I have not been very well lately."

"Well, don't you fall ill just now, you know, or we're clean done for."

"Oh no; there's no fear of that."

Throughout the day she rode about almost continuously in a cab, buying a great number of articles, a list of which had been prepared for her. When night came she went to the station, and waited for Burgoyne and Charker, who were going down with her. She was there about twenty minutes before the time the train was to start; but found that Jarman had got there a few minutes earlier. They walked together, arm in arm, to and fro upon the platform.

"Are you very tired and sleepy?" he asked. "What a day you have had of it."

"It has been like a fairy tale," she said; "and you are the good genius. How kind and noble you are. What do I not owe you?"

"Would you ever care to pay me?"

"Would I ever? I will."

"No; the price I should ask might be too high."

She looked up at him in surprise. There was a strange tremor in his voice.

"What do you mean, James? You know such kindness as yours can never be paid. Is there anyone else in the world who would do as you have done, and stretch out a hand to help me? It does not signify that the fault was not mine; the world——"

"Who cares for the world?" he answered, passionately. "I have all my life had the world against me. What then? I have had luck in my favour. I am rich now, and care nothing whether the world hate or love me. But, Ann, I am very lonely—I am sick for want of one love—one that cannot be mine—one that has been stolen from me."

"I do not understand," she said, in a flutter, slightly struggling to disengage her hand, and then closing it again upon his. "Yet I think I do. I am not worth this. You would regret it always. Let me go my way."

"Regret it! Not I, if you did not. See, Ann, the train is getting ready that is to take you from me. There are two lives open to you: one all lights, flowers, music, applauding crowds—for a few years,

that is—but while it lasts, a magic life, fascinating, fatal, which will rob me of you—which will rob you of yourself; the other is a life of peace and ease—luxury, if you will—or of travel through strange lands such as you used to tell me you dreamt of in those days when you spent so many long hours in looking out into that lonely little street."

The passengers were hurrying on to the platform. The bell was ringing, all was bustle and confusion.

"Take your places, gentlemen—take your places. Going by this train, ma'am?"

"No—yes—in a moment."

"Here is our Star," cried Burgoyne's voice. "Come along; I've got a *coupé* all to ourselves."

"Burgoyne said you would not be in time," said Charker. "I knew you would though. You are a girl of energy, I can see, who means to make the world her foot-stool; and by Heaven you will, if you try. You've got it in you."

"What do you say?" asked James.

Ann hesitated, stammered. "How can we break our promise now?"

"If you say 'Yes,' I'll do it in a moment for you."

She was silent. A thousand thoughts crowded at once upon her mind. Perhaps fortune and fame awaited her yonder. Here was her dream about to be realized. Should she let the golden opportunity go by? And if she became a great actress, was there not one who, hearing of her name, would——

"Come, come, Miss Mortimer!"

"Come along; we're just off."

"Will you give me a few hours, James? I will write."

He only pressed her hand in reply, and helped her into the carriage. The guard hastily closed the door, and the next moment the train started. The three travellers, looking back, saw Jarman still gazing after them until the broadening darkness shut him out from their view.

13.

The members of the stock company of the Theatre Royal Yokeltown were not much delighted at hearing that Mr. Burgoyne was himself coming down to superintend the last rehearsals. The actors of the leading parts knew very well that there was no chance of their getting engagements in town to play the same characters. They were only, as it were, keeping the beds warm for the lucky ones. It was quite likely that Burgoyne might take it into his head to act the principal character himself, or else the manager in London would be sure to do so. The stage-manager here had some experience of him.

"You'll catch it, some of you," he said. "He'll tell you you don't do it right before you speak. I've known him be in the house on the quiet, in a dark corner somewhere, at a rehearsal, and nobody have a ghost of a notion he was there, taking notes of everything. Regular coaching himself up to come and pitch into us the first time he publicly put in an appearance."

Somebody in the orchestra at this moment snapped a fiddlestring.

"You'll catch it, too, some of you, when Mr.

Burgoyne comes," continued the stage-manager. "Mind my words if you don't."

When he did come they did catch it. Nothing was right. Everything had to be tried over and over again; and he ignored the poor stage-manager's previous directions altogether. Not only was all the business chopped and changed about, but so technical was Mr. Burgoyne's language, that not one in a dozen, even among the carpenters, had the vaguest notion what he wanted done. Thus, instead of "Shut that trap," it was "Shore your O.P. trap;" and he was so learned upon the subject of floats, battens, wing-lights, and ground rows, the very gas-man did not, as he afterwards remarked, know exactly where he was to a week or two.

The unhappy machinists, flymen, stagemen, wingmen, flatmen, and cellarmen, trembled in their shoes when they heard his orders, and wildly pushed and pulled at the scenery until everybody—author, manager, and prompter—dëed them for dulheads in chorus.

It was really good fun to look on and see the vagaries of this irrepressible one when putting his brother actors through their paces. Your ordinary author, who is not an actor too, is generally a poor meek creature, who is afraid to make a suggestion; but Burgoyne knew all about everything, and was here, there, and everywhere.

One moment he was going up on the sloat—the trap or slide, by which fairies ascend to or descend from the clouds; then he was going through the "Corsican Brother" business on the scruto; and

lastly he was down in the orchestra leading the band.

"Blow this sort of thing," said Brown, the second low comedian. "Everything's going to be cut out. If I'm not to have my hiccups in the first act, there's nothing else left in the part."

He was a genuine specimen of his class, was Brown. One who invariably took advantage of a serious situation to make the people laugh, thereby proving that he ought to be first low comedian in place of the gentleman whom the people did not laugh at. He usually made himself prominent in mobs, and was enormous in a comic "hooray." Put him in "Julius Cæsar," as one of the citizens, and he was sure to be immensely funny, consequently very annoying to Brutus or Marc Antony, particularly in the oration scene; but make him a citizen in a burlesque of "Julius Cæsar," and tell him he was to be funny, and he would throw a gloom over the whole performance.

There was a haughty walking gent—a provincial *beau jeune homme*, who called himself a *jeune premier*, because he thought the other title was not very dignified.

"Walking gent! Walking stick, I call him," said Burgoyne. "I'll cut out that man Brown altogether, if he does not tone down of his own accord. That White seems a modest sort of fellow. I'll get him up to town this winter."

White was the first low comedian, and he was subsequently taken to London as Burgoyne had pro-

mised. Here, at the Sahara, he met with the fate of other wags before him. His duty was to try to be funny whilst the audience were settling themselves in their seats, or while they were turning their backs to the stage previous to going home very much exhausted by the sensation drama occupying the middle of the bill.

The company generally were anything but satisfied with the parts allotted to them, and still less with the changes which were made in the parts they had taken the trouble to learn. Nobody, in fact, was in a very pleasant mood; and Ann's reception was far from being a cordial one. Burgoyne was too busy, and Charker too excited, to speak to her. She stood alone in a corner of the dark stage, and waited with a throbbing heart for her turn to come.

It seemed to her that a rehearsal was much more trying than a public performance. It was a cold wet day; and perhaps it was because of the cold she shivered. She had had very little sleep overnight, and had been too fatigued in the morning to study her part. It was a much longer part than she had thought at first, and contained a vast amount of business.

"Miss Mortimer! Where's Miss Mortimer?"

"Miss Mortimer! Miss Mortimer!"

She was called at last, at a moment when she had not expected the summons.

"You ought to be there."

"No; she ought to be here."

"She enters from left third entrance, doesn't she, sir?"

"No; she doesn't. And if she did, she's not doing it. Stay; that's wrong. Higher up. No; lower down. Not that side at all."

Poor Ann! No wonder she lost her presence of mind under these various and conflicting orders, and wished herself safe home again—anywhere, in fact, but at the Theatre Royal Yokeltown.

"The whole of the second act goes very flat," Bugoyne said, when the rehearsal was over. "We must have on the limelight at the finish. That'll improve it."

The second low comedian sniggered at these words, and whispered to Ann—

"That's right. Limelight again! What would they do without it? Whenever a situation is a rightdown bad one, introduce the limelight and it's a sure success, and never mind about its being likely—in a railway tunnel or down a coal mine—anywhere."

"At any rate," said one of the other actors, "I'm glad school's broke up for to-day. I'm dead beat."

"It'll be worse to-morrow, though," said Brown "I'll bet you, he wants everything done just the reverse of what it is to-day."

Thus they separated; and Ann went home to her lodgings to learn her part. She ordered tea to be brought up, and while it was being got ready lay down upon the bed to take half an hour's nap. She fell asleep for several hours.

When she awoke, the thought that she had

wasted so much valuable time made her nervous. How was it possible now that she could be perfect in her part by the next evening? If she sat up all this night she could; but she felt that she had not strength enough for that. She would go to bed early and get up early.

She carried out her intention, but rose very little refreshed, after a feverish night. However, she sat down at once to study. After an hour or two she began to have a pretty good knowledge of the part. The words seemed to come to her more readily as she applied herself zealously to the task. The rehearsal call was at eleven. There were yet a couple of hours. Rap-tap.

It was the postman's knock which had disturbed her. The servant girl came running upstairs with a letter. The envelope was in Jarman's writing. Inside on a slip of paper was written—

"When your first performance is over, you will have time to think quietly. Then write to me."

There was another letter, however, round which the slip of paper had been wrapped, and the handwriting was a woman's. She opened the second envelope, and read there a few scrawled words within—

"My Dearest,—Can you ever forgive me? They say I am dying. Will you come and see me first?

"Harry Draper."

Wafered up in the passage, upon which the

stage-door opened, was to be read this announcement—

Saturday, October 15.

Ballet, Props, Supers, Scenes at 11.

Principals at 12·30.

The actors and actresses had assembled at the hour named, and the rehearsal commenced. When Miss Mortimer was called, she did not answer. Mr. Charker was inclined to be savage, but Burgoyne was anxious that the young lady should be treated kindly.

"Don't frighten her, for goodness sake. She's mistaken the time, I suppose. Here, some one run and fetch her. Will you, White, there's a good fellow."

White found her, seated, as he first thought, asleep. An open letter lay in her lap, the copy of her part upon the floor at her feet. She looked up at him in a frightened way.

"What has happened—is he worse?"

"Who? What—Charker? He only wanted to know what had become of you. He was afraid you had run away again to London. Come along; they're all waiting. You know your part, of course."

"Yes, yes—nearly."

"Come, then. Where's your bonnet?"

She seemed as though she were coming away with him without making this addition to her toilet. The low comedian looked at her more earnestly, and spoke in a gentle voice.

"You have had bad news in that letter. That is the worst of our life, my dear. We must make merry when our hearts are sad. We have sold ourselves to the public, and belong to the public. We must try and forget that there are any such persons in the world as Miss Mortimer, or Mr. White. We are the heroes and heroines of Mr. Burgoyne's grand new and original sensation drama, and must break our hearts only about the troubles he is kind enough to make for us. Is this your shawl? That's it. Lean on my arm, my dear."

They were waiting in great anxiety at the theatre, but no remark was made on the lateness of the young lady's arrival.

"Don't flurry her," said Burgoyne; "she's fresh at it, you know."

"I hope there won't be anything occur again like that you told me happened at the amateur theatre," Charker said.

"No, no. Besides, that was not her fault. It was the fault of the infuriated ecclesiastic."

"There's no chance of his bearing down upon us here, is there?"

"Not likely. We'll have the stage doors guarded by a strong body of police; and in the orchestra they shall keep drawn swords handy in their fiddle-cases."

But though they thus joked upon the subject,

the two gentlemen felt anything but easy in their minds. The rehearsal passed off in a halting, jerky way. Ann read her part, and said that she would be sure to come perfect in the evening. The actors looked askance at one another, and smiled. Some of the actresses were not particular in how loud a tone they expressed their sentiments regarding the debutante.

Why should a nobody-knows-who be put in there over their heads? What experience could she have had? Not much, evidently. She seemed to be ignorant of the oldest stage traditions, and as yet she had shown no signs of histrionic talent.

Mr. Charker made no remark. "She's good enough, I daresay," he said to himself. Mr. Burgoyne was also of his opinion. He belonged to the new school for the levelling of actors and elevation of scenery. His plays were so constructed that, unless he acted in them himself, there was no leading character. Therefore utility people would do well enough for all the parts.

The rehearsal over, Ann went back to her lodgings and tried to study her part. But the words swam before her eyes, and her memory failed her at every moment. How could she think upon any but one subject. He was dying, and had begged her to come to him.

Presently she flung down her book, and hurried to the railway station. There she entered the telegraph office and despatched a message to Mrs. Starkey to ask her immediately to send back word whether Draper was better or worse.

"When shall I have an answer?"

"By eight o'clock."

She would then be on the stage.

"Send the answer to me at the theatre."

She went home again and resumed her study. She had not sat down at it very long when Burgoyne called. He had been very uneasy when he came to think things over quietly after the rehearsal. Was there yet time to give the character to anybody else? Who could undertake it? He broke the matter gently, and the ladies to whom it was proposed, in a high state of indignation, offered a hundred objections to such a course.

The facts of the case, if the truth must be told, were not exactly as they had been represented. Charker had had some trouble with his leading lady, and for reasons of his own, wished to show he was independent of her. Upon her pleading a slight indisposition therefore at the first rehearsal, Charker had cut her altogether out of the piece.

"I'm going to give it to some one else," he said. "No one here. A young lady of great talent and extremely elegant appearance. She'll come back from town with me, I daresay."

He had not the remotest notion who the lady was to be, but rushed up to London and consulted Burgoyne, and Ann turned up at a lucky moment. Burgoyne had entertained a somewhat similar idea of ousting some one from the London theatre, where his piece was afterwards to be produced, and he had thought of Ann, and therefore spoken to Jarman about her. The very night after Ann met the author,

Charker made his appearance, and Burgoyne was regretting that he had neglected to ask her for her address, at the identical moment that James entered the room.

It would, therefore, be not a little mortifying to the manager as well as disastrous to the author if Ann failed; and yet they were now far from sanguine of the result. Burgoyne was pleased to find her studying—at any rate to find her with the book open before her.

"Are you getting on all right?" he asked. "We expect great things of you, you know. You must not be frightened."

"Yes, yes, I will do my best, to be sure—to be sure."

She spoke in an absent way, however, and as though she scarcely knew what she was saying. Burgoyne went away less easy in his mind than he had been before he came.

"Perhaps she is all right after all," he said to himself, "and perhaps she does not know a word of it. One alternative is as probable as the other. Confound these women; there's no knowing what to make of them."

The hour for the performance drew near. Yokeltown has theatrical tendencies, and three theatres. Many new pieces are produced there; some written specially for the Yokeltown-folk, who are of a critical nature, and award praise only where praise is due. At six o'clock there was a good crowd at the doors. The people going to the pit and gallery

were inclined to be noisy. The half-hour having gone, they began to bang loudly at the doors.

"Don't put them out of temper, for God's sake," said Burgoyne, who heard the noise from the interior of the theatre. "Why don't the fools open the doors?"

A moment afterwards the doors were opened, and the sound of an army of thick boots was audible upon the stone stairs, accompanied by the chink—chink of the tin cheques, as the moneytaker rapidly exchanged them for the sixpences handed to him.

"There'll be a fine house, anyhow," said Charker, "but a mortal rough lot. I wish we hadn't tried it on a Saturday, under the circumstances."

"Why?"

"If that girl should make a mess of it."

"Oh, she wont."

"I hope not! I dare say Farquhar's got some of her friends in to hiss. She's quite capable of it." (Farquhar was the lady with whom Charker had quarrelled.)

"You've got in your own people as well, I suppose?"

"Oh, of course."

"There's not much strange paper though, is there?"

"None, I hope. It's dangerous to do much of that in a country town—even a large town like this. Everybody knows everybody else, you see, and it would get wind. In London it's different."

"Oh, in London we have to manage the matter carefully too. If it's a frost at starting, we advertise

crowded houses, and all that sort of thing, of course, and stick up a notice of no more room in the pit. We have done that often when there have not been five pounds in money in the house—all paper. But we never let the actors have any. We keep them in the dark as much as the public."

"So that when they want an order they get it second-hand from the public-house next door, or the cigar shop round the corner."

"Most probably."

There was a tremendous thumping and a loud hissing from the gallery. The orchestra, it had been arranged, should play five minutes earlier; instead, owing to some misunderstanding, they began five minutes later than usual. At last they came, and played their best. Nobody listened. The curtain drew up on the opening farce. The unfortunate Mr. White was as comic as he could be when there was so much noise going on that only a third of what he said could be heard. Then the curtain descended with mixed applause and hisses; and the audience got ready for the next piece.

A waiter from the principal hotel had come over late in the afternoon and engaged the last private box not disposed of. He had taken it in the name of Smith, and it stood empty during the farce. When the curtain rose upon the great drama, a dark-bearded man entered it and took his place at the back, so that it was very difficult to make out his features from the stage.

The music was playing now. Ann had come some time ago. She was dressed, and in obedience

to the call, had descended to the green-room. White found her here when he presently came in from changing his dress.

"Well, how are you now? You look very nice. Feel more at home, now, don't you?"

"Oh, yes—a little excited. It is the music, I think, and I'm so fresh at it. I suppose the music does not excite you in that way?"

"I don't know. Just a little, perhaps. Take it coolly now. Speak up, and don't care a button for any one."

"Thank you, thank you."

The first act was half over. It went rather tamely. A favourite appeared, and carried a scene through with considerable applause. Then came a hitch and loud hissing.

Charker came in front and begged for indulgence. There was applause at this; and then he said, that he was well-informed that there were persons present who had come in sworn to make the piece a failure. At this there was loud disapprobation. It was one of those rash ventures managers are so fond of, but which generally succeed. Burgoyne at the wing bit his lips.

"That Charker always was an ass," he muttered.

The favourite actor went on again now, and the low comedian made his appearance. A telling situation brought the act drop down, amidst general applause. One or two faint hisses from a back seat were drowned most effectually.

The second act opened weakly with a "car-

penter's scene" and a long dialogue, in the words of which the actors were not perfect. Then there followed a stage wait. The discontented party grew louder in their demonstrations. The front scene gave place to an elaborate set piece for which there was great applause, and a call for the scenic artist. Then some lively business followed—a crowd well arranged, and then Ann entered from a bridge and came down front. The crowd gave way; the audience in dead silence waited.

Burgoyne whispered savagely,

"Why don't your people applaud?"

"The idiots," muttered Charker, and stamped his foot on the ground. Then nervously cried, "Go on, go on. Damn it, why don't you prompt. What's she stopping for?"

She *was* stopping. The prompter was prompting, but she seemed not to hear him. Her lips opened, but she said nothing. She put her hand up to her face and seemed to stagger.

White was on the stage and approaching her gave her her cue again in an improvised sentence. The audience having waited patiently for a few moments, wondering not a little began to laugh and hiss. One solitary person was heard to applaud, but the hisses frightened him, and he desisted after a feeble effort.

"It's stage fright," cried Charker with an oath.

"It's idiocy," exclaimed Burgoyne. Some one standing by touched him on the sleeve.

"A telegram came for the lady just before she went on. It was given her at the wing."

The scene had somehow reached a conclusion amidst jeers and hisses and laughter. The curtain had fallen. That act at least was a failure. Ann had no sooner escaped from the stage than she fled to her dressing-room. Some one following in search of her found her with her head lying on the table, sobbing pitifully.

"What do they all say? I am disgraced for ever, and I have ruined them, have I not? Where can I hide myself?"

"Don't talk like that, my dear. There, there, don't be a fool. You must go on again."

"Again? impossible. I can never go on again."

"No, no," a voice said. "No more, unless you choose. Put on your cloak and bonnet. You shall go away quietly with me if you wish. But why are you afraid?"

It was James Jarman who spoke—the Mr. Smith, of course, of the private box.

"Oh, James," she said, running to him for help and shelter, "it was not that I was afraid, but oh, so wretched! I have had a message. He is dying. He may not live through the night. How can I think of anything else at such a time?"

What a night of shame and humiliation to look back at! Would she ever be able to face the public again after such a disgrace? Yes, before long she shall appear again before a crowded audience, but of a different and even less indulgent kind. She

shall appear in her own name then—and it shall be when she is being tried at the Old Bailey.

Now, the playhouse was left far behind, and she was speeding on her way across country to the little watering-place where Harry Draper lay dying. Already she had no thought for what had happened—scarcely recollected it. One idea only occupied her mind,—would she be in time? Would he be dead before she reached him? Was there a hope of being with him if only for a brief hour? Was it possible that there was hope even beyond this—hope of renewed life in renewed love?

14.

When Tom Yolland returned from his unsuccessful negotiation with Draper's mother, he found the enemy in possession. Poor pretty little pale-faced enemy! She did not look very formidable, but he frowned upon her none the less fiercely on that account.

"That woman here!" he exclaimed to Mrs. Starkey. "What does it mean? How on earth has it come about?"

Mrs. Starkey, in a flutter, explained. Almost directly Thomas Yolland turned his back upon his friend, the poor gentleman began to get worse. He got very bad indeed. Mrs. Starkey became very frightened. Mr. Starkey said something ought to be done; and Mrs. Starkey asked the sick man whether he desired that anybody should be sent for, and thus the letter was written, which was the cause of Ann's not knowing her part.

Yolland returned, and walking straight up stairs, met Ann upon the first landing.

"Hush!" she said. "You must not go in."

"Not go in?"

"Not yet."

"Why?" blustered Tom. He felt that he had a right to be by his friend's bedside. What right

had this creature there—there or anywhere else for that matter?

"He is fast asleep," Ann whispered, "and the doctor said he was not to be disturbed. Will you come again presently?"

"Oh, yes, I'll come again," said Tom Yolland, with a smile full of meaning—a smile which seemed to say, "You will find me a tough customer, my lady, and not one very easily to be dealt with. You need not think to practise any of your tricks upon me, because it will not do. No! no! Have a care. Look out for yourself. It shall be a fair battle; but I give you warning there shall be no quarter."

He turned abruptly on his heel when he had spoken, and went his way again in a state of great indignation, and very much determined. Good soul, how often are we girding up our loins, the rest of us, to do battle with pasteboard giants and ogres of lath and plaster, giving ourselves the grandest airs imaginable, as though of Christian heroes of great prowess!

In the end, then, the enemy was left in possession triumphant. Not very triumphant, by the way, but yet having the credit of having played her cards very well, and being monstrously wily and designing.

Ann had found her lover very ill indeed—his state had been little, if at all, exaggerated. It was the opinion of the doctor that he most likely would not live out the night, but yet he had found strength

to scribble down the few words which had been sent to her under cover to James Jarman. When this letter had been sent, he seemed to revive a little.

"I will live till she comes," he said; "I must see her."

They expected her next morning, then in the afternoon, then at night, but she did not come. Mrs. Starkey said—"She wont come in time after all," and she asked the doctor's opinion. The doctor gave one of those vague answers which are so professional:—"He may last an hour or two only—perhaps a week."

But the sick man seemed determined to keep his word. He would live till she came. She came before noon the next day, having travelled all night. She did not knock at the street door. Knowing how it could be opened from without, she turned the handle as she had often done before, and entered.

She passed upstairs noiselessly and without meeting any person, and opened the sitting-room door. The room was dark and silent, not a sound was to be heard within the sleeping chamber. She trembled and held her breath. Had she arrived too late?

But almost at the same moment that this thought occurred to her a low, weak voice called out—

"Ann! Ann! have you come?"

She ran forward and took him in her arms. She had forgotten all his treachery to her. The recollection only of the old love and happiness

lingered in her heart, and she laid her pale cheek against his, wasted and haggard by illness.

An hour or so later it seemed as though her presence had brought back some of the old gaiety and sunshine which had been so long strangers to the invalid's lodgings. She opened the windows, pulled back the curtains, sent out for flowers, and decorated the apartment.

She seemed to settle down quite naturally into the task of nursing—a work at which all women are clever when they love the person whom they nurse. She tasted broths and slops, and watched the clock face for the time to come when the medicine was to be given.

Draper lay very silent, but his eyes followed her restlessly when she moved to and fro,—when she went and came again. He seemed afraid that she might once more run away and leave him. He would not go to sleep unless she sat by his bedside holding his hand in hers.

When he slept, two tears trickled slowly down his cheeks, and his lips moved as though in entreaty. He woke up gasping and frightened.

"I was afraid it was too late," he said, hoarsely, "too late to repair the wrong I have done. Thank God, there is time! Ring the bell."

She rang, and when Mrs. Starkey came he bade her go at once for the best solicitor in the neighbourhood, and beg him to attend immediately. Mr. Wainwright, from the Royal Terrace, came within half an hour, and Draper consulted with him for some time alone. After this interview the solicitor

departed in a great hurry, bending his steps in the direction of the railway.

When Mr. Wainwright was gone, Draper called Ann to the bedside.

"You can never love me as much as you once did," he said. "You cannot trust me the same."

"I do not know what other women would do," she answered, pressing his hand, "or what I ought to do, but I think I shall always love you."

"Enough to marry me in reality?"

It presently appeared that Mr. Wainwright's presence had been required so that he might be consulted respecting the most expeditious mode of procuring a marriage licence, and that he had departed to take the necessary steps, with instructions that no expense need be spared. It was not likely that either Draper or Ann would inform the people of the house what business was in hand, but somehow the news got wind—probably because Mr. Starkey had listened at the keyhole—and there was great excitement in the lower regions. Of course this conduct upon Draper's part raised him greatly in the estimation of the women. How noble was such conduct! (Noble to leave off acting like a scoundrel, and do what he ought to have done at first, did they mean?) How princely was the lavish outlay—for it was rumoured that the expense would be but little short of a hundred pounds.

Tom Yolland, had he been aware of what was going on, would probably have entertained very

different opinions to these, but his literary business carried him at this moment, much against his will, to London, and there was no one by to thwart the machinations of the syren.

Thus one of the great sensation scenes of this little drama occurred during his absence. The marriage took place under the most romantic circumstances, by candle light, with closed doors, with frightened women listening on the stairs without. The clergyman's deep voice just faintly audible, now and then reached their ears, as also now and again a half-suppressed sob. It was more like a funeral than a wedding, and those who assisted without license upon the stairs crept away trembling when the room door opened, and the lawyer, the clergyman, and a third person who had been present came solemnly down to the street.

But the doctor's visit an hour or so later brought hope of happiness to come to one heart at least. He pronounced Draper's state to be slightly improved. He might even now get all right again if he were kept perfectly quiet.

"I feel much better myself," Draper said. "Why did you all try to frighten me? I shall not die after all—not yet. I have a great future before me."

She was sitting by his side. Her eyes filled with tears as he spoke, and she gently smoothed his cheek, smiling on him as she did so. But with a restless motion of his head he caused her to desist.

"Where's Tom Yolland?" he said. "I ought to

see him. That affair must not be neglected. I've wasted time enough as it is."

There was not much difficulty about obtaining quiet just now in the little watering-place. There were no other lodgers in the house. The season was over, and the apartments in the house on either side stood empty.

The gay promenaders were gone—the fashionably-dressed young ladies and gentlemen. The great army of tag-rag had also departed—the nigger melodists, Punch showmen, fortune-tellers, and the like. The band which had been engaged by the tradespeople for the summer months had gone too, but it had not yet broken up. Some of the seaside visitors recognised the old band again playing before their houses in town, but they did not reward the musicians with the same liberality as they used to do in the summer days upon the sands.

Only a few strangers remained in the town, and these were an unprofitable lot to deal with. Unreasonable persons eking out small incomes, haggling in an unseemly fashion over the change of even sixpence—actually living there for economy's sake. Everywhere there were bills of "Lodgings to Let" in the windows. The long-talked-of happy dull season was approaching when there was time for rest and pleasure, only the other season had been so bad. It was generally allowed that the season had been bad.

"We stood empty two months."

"We only had what you might call one good let."

"The place is nothing to what it used to be."

"The company is nothing to what it used to be."

"The seasons are all turned topsy turvy. There's no summer now-a-days."

It was generally supposed, however, that the Starkeys had done well. How was it then that Mr. Starkey took even a gloomier view of life than was his wont, and loitering longer than usual at the Benbow bar, drank deeper? It had long been understood that Mr. Starkey had got a lawsuit on relating to his wife's property. It was said, by those who were not numbered among Mr. Starkey's admirers, that the suit had been instituted by Mr. Starkey to wrongfully obtain possession of property belonging to Mr. Starkey's wife's sister—a minor.

This action, after many turns and twistings of a wholly unanticipated nature, had concluded adversely to Mr. Starkey's interests, and it was a question whether in thus trying to get more than belonged to him he had not lost all he originally had. Mr. Starkey was evidently, on his own showing, in a bad way.

The town was certainly quiet enough now, and perhaps a little dull. The sea waves washed the shore to a sad music. A cold land-wind blew down the lonely street, drifting the dead leaves it gathered on its way upon the door-steps of the dark and desolate-looking houses.

Only a faint light glimmered here and there, and one of these was from the window of the room where all Ann loved on earth lay hovering 'twixt life and death.

15.

William Bradshaw lived in a snug little house near his chapel. He might have had a much larger house had he thought fit to do so, for his income was a very comfortable one; but he was careful withal and kept well within it. He had managed to save some money, and had invested it advantageously in the purchase of literary property. He was now one of the principal proprietors of the *Thirsty Soul*, to which he contributed some articles that were very popular.

There was much talk of a larger chapel being found for him. He was so run after now that the accommodation at the old chapel was wholly inadequate—people blocking up the aisles and crowding the doorways. The low music hall company a few houses off were even tempted to pay Mr. Bradshaw a visit to ascertain what made him "draw so." Some of the newspapers had begun systematically to write him down, and he was getting on famously.

If another chapel were found for him, or a new one built, he might take a larger house adjoining it, or if he had any family—for, as ought previously to have been mentioned, he had recently married.

He had been united to one of the daughters of that Mrs. Hodson whom we met at the tea-meeting

described a good many chapters back. It was said to be a very good match. She was 'a very estimable young woman, somewhat long of nose and bony of outline; but in all other respects agreeable. They did not begin life as some other married couples do, as though matrimony were a game of play, as though they were children who had had a present made them of a new doll's house.

Martha was from the first serious and orderly and economical. She quite naturally picked up the bunch of keys and glided into the household duties as though she had been all her life looking on, waiting for the place. The servants very soon found out they had got a mistress in the house, and, before a month was over, there were battles royal about the waste in the kitchen and the oglements of the libertine baker.

She made him a good wife, everyone said. She kept the house well on a surprisingly small allowance. Her servants feared and respected her. Her husband also feared her a little, and never indulged in a joke when they were alone. Nothing, indeed, could be more serious and improving than those evenings they spent together *tête-à-tête*. She asked him questions upon various points of belief. His talk at times took almost the form of a short sermon, and she would listen gravely, inclining her head at intervals over her teacup.

In due course she became sub-editor of the *Thirsty Soul*, and the terror of the "printers' devils," who, by the way, were not thus named at the

establishment where that journal was set-up and machined.

There was, we can readily imagine, about as little "love nonsense" talked by this young couple as ever there was by any married couple who did not exactly scratch and bite each other at the end of the first four-and-twenty hours. Perhaps William did not desire that sort of thing. Martha, with all her good qualities, was not one of those women men make pets and playthings of. She loved her William as a good wife ought to do, and for nearly a year after their marriage kissed him regularly when he entered or left the house.

At all times she was solicitous for his comfort, and warmed his slippers in the winter time. She was even a little jealous. Once or twice she frowned very darkly upon such female members of her husband's flock as pressed around him at the tea-meetings, and once or twice, when occasion offered, she stabbed him sharply with needle-pointed epigrams upon the subject of that love affair of long ago with that "mountebank girl;"—so Ann was spoken of in the Hodson family, where the fact of the amateur performance had become known.

Was William happy? He was growing fat, at any rate. He took very kindly to his meals, and rode when he went his rounds, instead of going, as heretofore, on foot. He was looked up to as a king in his little circle, and morning, noon, and night he heard his praises sung by many voices. It was heavenly music, sweet to listen to.

That affair of long ago! But, after all, it was not so very long ago as regards actual time. Not more than a year! Yet what a long while since it seemed. He had made such strides in life. He was so much more famous, and so well married.

After all he had done well in shaking himself free from the Whitaker connexion. No good could have come of it. They would have dragged him down. As for the girl, if what he had heard had any foundation of truth, he had had a lucky escape in breaking off the marriage.

One morning, when he was seated at breakfast, there came a knock at the street-door, and the servant brought him in a card on which he read the name of James Jarman. He put down again untasted the cup of tea he was raising to his lips, and leant back in his chair. Mrs. Bradshaw, looking round the tea-urn, saw how uneasy he appeared, and asked what had happened.

"Nothing! nothing!" he replied impatiently, and rising, left the room. When he had passed through the door, Mrs. Bradshaw jumped up and looked at the card.

James Jarman was waiting in the study where he had been shown by the servant. He was standing with his back to the fire, and had not taken off his hat. He did not take it off now, but, with. his hands in his pockets, nodded towards his cousin

William, without nodding, took a chair, and waited for the other to begin the conversation; and while he did so, he made a critical survey of

Jarman's general appearance. He was not shabbily dressed, but so carelessly, that it had almost the same effect as shabby clothes. He wore a large ragged beard, and his hair was long and untidy. There was, too, a wild, haggard look about his face. At the first glance, William fancied that he was aither mad or drunk.

"You're surprised to see me, I dare say," he said.

"Yes," said William, shortly.

"I should not have called on you if I could have helped it. We have not seen much of one another since I came back, have we? Well, our paths in life lie in opposite directions; but for once they come together."

"Will you take a chair?" said William.

"No. You can guess, I dare say, why I am here. It is about Ann."

William made an impatient gesture. The other continued—

"Do you know what has become of her?"

"I do not wish to know."

"I can understand that, but you must. A cursed villain did her as great wrong as man can do to woman. With a mock marriage——"

William rose abruptly with an expression of disgust.

"That is her version of the affair. Of course! Of course! One of the mock marriages of romance —at least, what I am told are put into romances. I do not read that class of book."

"There is no occasion for half the words you are

wasting. What I tell you is the truth, and not what she says. When she found out how she had been cheated she left him, and being ashamed to apply to me or to you——"

"To me, indeed!"

"To me then—she was reduced to the greatest misery. She would, I believe, have perished for want had I not accidentally discovered her."

"I saw the advertisements. They were sufficiently public, I think, as indeed have been many other details connected with this most disgraceful business."

"This man Draper has—how, I know not—persuaded her to go back to him."

"Easily persuaded, I dare say," sneered William.

"Easily or not, the fact is there. As you observed just now, the details of the case have already been too public. But will the publicity end where it is? If the circumstances of the case, and your relationship, become known to your congregation, what then?"

"Become known," said William, with a start. "Who would dare?"

"Who can say? Clearly it is best that the matter should end at once. She must be brought back again."

"How? we cannot force her?"

"No, but we can frighten him. He is a poor weak fool. It is your trade to coax and frighten. Suppose you go to him."

"I have met the man once," said William, after

a moment's silence. "I am afraid that good words would be thrown away upon him."

"But you might try, and if persuasion fail——"

"Well, what then?"

"You are much the stronger of the two, and in your place I'd beat him to death with my walking-stick."

"I think you're mad," said William.

James laid his hat upon the table, and wiped his face. "I dare say," he said in a low voice. "I suppose it is something of that sort," and there was a silence of some moments.

"I do not see how I can interfere in this matter," said William, presently. "My interference might only lead to some unpleasant publicity, and cannot possibly do any good. If you will take my advice, you also will let the affair rest."

"And is that the religion you teach?" asked the other, bitterly. "Save sinners as long as you can save them without danger to yourself. After all, why should I be surprised. I suppose yours is a business the same as any other."

William moved towards the door.

"We need not prolong this interview, I think."

"No, I think not," said James, and walked straight out into the street without another word.

16.

As soon as Mr. Thomas Yolland had finished his business in town, he made up his mind to go back to his sick friend, and see what was to be done. There was a very determined look about his square-cut mouth as he marched down the hill leading from the railway station to the lower end of the town, where Draper's lodgings were situated.

There was something about the look of his eye which seemed to indicate that he meant to stand no nonsense from anybody.

Nor did he. Therefore, when he arrived at Starkey's house, he opened the street-door himself, and marched upstairs unannounced. His heavy step, as he crossed the little drawing-room, roused Harry Draper, who was at the moment asleep. "Is that you, my darling," he asked.

Tom Yolland's lip curled at this term of endearment. "It is I," he said, presenting himself at the foot of the bed.

Draper regarded him with a very blank expression of countenance, and coloured slightly.

"Oh, it is you, is it? What a while you have been away."

"I hope I've come in time."

"In time? Oh, yes. I'm much better, the doctor says; he has great hopes of me."

"I did not mean that. When I left you I was afraid you were in danger of something else besides death. Look here, Draper, are you well enough to bear a long talk? I really want to speak to you seriously."

Draper looked somewhat uneasily towards his friend. He fancied he knew what the other would say, but he was silent.

"It is about this connexion, Harry. Unless you would blight all your prospects, it *must* be broken off."

"You mean if I accept this appointment?"

"Of course you will do so, if you ever regain your health."

"Oh, I have no fear of that; I shall be quite well soon—in a week or so—but——"

"But what? There can be no great difficulty in doing what I say."

"Yes, there is, more than you think."

"Leave it to me. If you place the matter in my hands, you may make your mind quite easy as to the result."

Draper was silent for a moment.

"They all made out I was so much worse than I really was," he said, in a complaining tone; "I was forced into it."

"I can understand that. She should never have been allowed to know you were ill at all. Women know their power at such a time; they are all alike, designing, calculating; I know them well."

"It was unfair to frighten me—a sick man."

"It was very unfair, but luckily there is no harm done."

"What?"

"Don't be alarmed, Harry, but leave it to me, as I said before. If she really cares for you, as she pretends, she will sacrifice herself for your sake; she will not try to drag you down. Ah, don't tell me; women have often made these sacrifices where they have truly loved."

"What, the designing ones?"

Tom Yolland saw that there had been some sort of contradiction in his argument; he hit on another tack, for he was fully determined to save his poor friend, as he thought. It seemed to Tom Yolland, from the Tom Yolland point of view, that this passion was in all respects mean and vulgar, but it occurred to him that perhaps, after all, he was not going quite the right way to disgust Draper, even allowing the possibility of the existence of any high feelings and sentiments on the part of the enemy.

"Look here, Harry, I can't recognise you for your old self a bit in this business; you used not to be the sort to be talked over so easily by a chit of a girl. I've heard you swear a score of times you would never love seriously. Why, you were always such a lawless sort of fellow. You seemed to snap your fingers, as it were, at all the little weaknesses flesh is heir to. You've quite frightened me many a time."

Draper smiled with infinite self-satisfaction.

"Who says I'm changed?" he asked. "It's not fair to criticise a man who's down on a sick bed. You see the girl's been very loving and devoted, and all that sort of thing. I'm obliged to make her some sort of return; I couldn't really be hard on her."

"Of course not; I never would have suggested such a course; but there are many ways in which a man in your position might show his gratitude to a woman in hers. I was afraid that you really were seriously in love with her."

"Seriously in love!" said Draper, with his old laugh. "You ought to have known me better. Of course I love now as I have loved before a score of times—no more."

But close upon his observation followed a sort of sob or cry of pain from the drawing-room beyond, the door of which stood ajar, and Yolland rose hastily to see who might be listening. As he approached, however, a light step fled before him. He followed to the head of the stairs and looking down saw Ann.

She turned upon the landing and looked up at him with a dull fixedness in her eyes. He called to her but she made no answer, and passed quickly downward and out into the street.

"That woman would like to thrust a dagger into me, I know," said Yolland to himself. "It was awkward she should have heard what she did, but after all perhaps it is for the best. The thing must really be broken off."

"Well," said Draper, when Yolland returned,

"who was it, the landlady or the landlord?—I know he listens."

"No, it was neither."

Draper started up into a half-sitting posture, with a look of terror.

"You—you do not mean——"

Yolland nodded. "Yes, I do."

Draper fell back and clasped his hands over his face. Then struggled up once more, and gasped in great excitement—

"Go for her. Fetch her back! Do not stop to talk to me, I am a pitiful liar and fool! She is really my wife, and I love her more than all the world!"

Tom Yolland was rather slow in obeying his friend's commands. He wanted further explanations and directions. When at length he reached the street she was nowhere visible. He walked some distance to the right and to the left, and looked about him, and made inquiries, and eventually bent his steps towards his hotel.

Here, it being the hour for which he had ordered dinner, he partook of it, and over his solitary meal pondered long and deeply. Perhaps, after all, he thought to himself, he had better leave Harry Draper to go his own way. Perhaps, after all, he might have been a trifle too officious.

"As he is married, there's an end of the matter. He's a fool, that's all."

While Mr. Yolland was yet sipping his wine, a face he knew passed the window—a thin, dark face,

with a bushy beard. A minute or two afterwards a voice, which was also familiar to him, was heard inquiring of a waiter in the passage without for the address of a Mr. Harry Draper. It was, of course, James Jarman.

Yolland watched him from the bow window of the coffee-room—a window which commanded a view of the straggling High Street, and of Paradise Place in the far distance. He saw him walk at a brisk pace to within a dozen yards or so of the house, and come to a stand-still to stare up at it from those railings on which Mr. Starkey during the season had smoked so many pipes.

After lounging here awhile, instead of entering the house, he turned away and took the direction of the sands, and presently descended some rugged steps hewn in the chalk of the cliff.

When Ann had left the drawing-room an hour or so previously it was in this direction she had turned, and very soon was lost to view behind an overhanging rock. Thus Yolland had missed her. The steps led down to a wild part of the shore which was but little resorted to by the visitors. It had the character of being dangerous, for the flood-tide often overtook unwary wanderers and cut off all hope of retreat. Several people had been drowned here.

Here among some scattered masses of rock the sea rolled in across a flat beach with surprising swiftness even in calm weather, and when the weather was rough the waves dashed over them tumultuously with a mighty froth and bluster, tower-

ing mountains high. But just now it was low tide. A broad waste of wet, black sand lay stretched out towards the sea. The sun had set. The sky was dull and leaden of hue. Not a living soul was to be seen—not a sail upon the sea, or a bird in the air: not a sign of life, except the one lonely figure of the despairing woman sitting among the rocks.

17.

When James Jarman left William Bradshaw's presence he went straight to the railway terminus from which the trains started that in the merry sea-side season took those shoals of pleasure-seekers to the little watering-place where Draper lay ill.

The season being over, however, few trains ran there now, and James was told that he would have full three hours to wait. He did not, as he probably would have done at any other time, go away and return again at the proper time. He had nowhere to go, or nowhere he cared to go to. He had not eaten or drunk that day, but it did not occur to him to go and eat and drink. He sat down upon the nearest seat and resolutely made his mind up to sit there till the three hours were over.

A boy selling papers on the platform offered him one, but he refused to buy. It seemed to him that there could not possibly be anything in any paper in the world he would care to read about. The boy held in his hand an enticing list of contents. A royal marriage, an earthquake, a horrible murder, an important article upon the last political crisis! What was all this to him? He smiled and said, "It's not worth a penny."

The boy did not argue the point. Perhaps he

also was of that opinion, and wondered at the taste of grown-up people. At any rate he went his way and left Jarman at peace. He sat therefore a whole hour undisturbed, seeming to watch the bustle of the platform, but really watching nothing—seeing nothing—scarcely thinking.

For he had formed no plan of action. He had vaguely said to himself that he would go down and bring Ann away. He would somehow persuade her to come, but he had no idea how. He had not prepared a word to say. He tried once or twice to think of an argument, but could not do so. He would think of one when he saw her. That would be time enough.

Only an hour of the three gone yet. He rose and wandered to and fro, dreamily staring before him. The railway guards wanted to know whether he was "going on." The man at the book-stall made excuses for pushing against and squeezing in before him; he stood there so long without making a purchase, perhaps blocking out intending purchasers. He hung about so long and so suspiciously that the railway authorities began to form conjectures respecting him. He was either a detective officer or a pick-pocket.

He wandered out into the street during the third hour, and paused upon the steps of the station, gazing about in the same listless fashion. As is customary when anyone with a decent coat upon his back comes to a standstill in the street either to think over his own business or trouble, or talk to a friend about his, at least half a dozen street hawkers

and vagrants came up and told their tales, sang the praises of their wares, or whined for halfpence. He scowled some of these off, refused others, and turned away from the rest. A wan-faced woman came up last, and dropped a dismal courtesy, murmuring indistinct prayers. He turned upon his heel, and re-entered the station.

Looking back, however, he saw her still standing gazing very wistfully in his direction; but as he looked she turned and crawled onwards despondently. Upon that he hastened after her, and feeling in his pocket gave her the first coin that came uppermost —a sovereign. She gazed from it to him, holding it out in her hand, very much astonished, as well she might be, and asked whether he had made a mistake.

"No," he said; "why?"

She then began to cry and bless him; but he turned on his heel more savagely than before. She still followed, however, wishing him all earthly happiness and happiness beyond. He then faced about in a great rage for people were staring at them he found.

"Confound you," he said, "go away." So she went.

During the last half-hour of his waiting he went to the refreshment bar, and drank a glass of wine. While he was there a friend tapped him on the shoulder. James turned and stared at him for a moment doubtfully, not remembering who he was.

"You recollect me, don't you, Jarman?" said

his friend. "I recollect you quite well. We very nearly had our throats cut together one night in the lower town of Quebec."

A veil of years fell from before Jarman's eyes. He stretched out his hand and shook the other's warmly.

"I remember!" he said. "We both of us almost finished our lives in company on that occasion. What have you done since?"

"I have been knocking about a good deal since; making and losing money."

"On the whole have you made more than you have lost?"

"Of course I must have made it first to lose it."

"That does not follow, does it? Where are you going now?"

"Of all places in the world to What's its name, Super-Mare."

"Of all places in the world, I am going there too. It is a matter of five years since we last travelled together, is it not? Why not travel together now? For the last time perhaps—who knows? Life is so short, and the world so wide."

"Not wide enough for us to pass on this side of it without our meeting one another, I'm glad to say."

"Yes, you are right," said James thoughtfully. "The world after all cannot be very wide that our loves and hates should be centred in so narrow a circle. We cross and recross each other, brought together again and again, as though by fate."

"You don't object to smoking if I remember

rightly," said his friend when they had taken their seats in the carriage.

"No; let us smoke. It's a cheap luxury."

"Not that your cigar looks a cheap one."

"No, not very. I have no other way of spending my money."

"And you have been lucky eh, Jarman? You were lucky in old times."

"I have always done the wrong thing as everybody thought (myself included), and it has generally turned up the only right thing. I have prospered by the neglect of good advice and the waste of 'golden opportunities.' My greatest successes have arisen out of my own negligence. It is because I have all my life been ignorant, idle, and lucky that I have somehow made a fortune. I speculate because it amuses me, and I generally win."

"I've heard of your good fortune. Suppose now you were to speculate for me!"

"I might lose your money. There's no rule in the game, and after all, the only stake I ever prayed to win, I lost."

"What stake was that?" the other asked; but James made no reply. With the old dreamy look he was gazing out upon the seemingly endless marshes, through which the train was swiftly bearing them. Out there, spread about very far apart upon the swampy meadow-land, were dreary little homesteads, poverty stricken and forlorn in aspect, showing no signs of life. Leading from there to who should say where, were long straggling roads, on which no travellers were visible.

A desolate region it seemed, well nigh forsaken by man, and yet on a swing gate near which the rails ran, there was a couple making love and kissing. What couple were these whom the dreamy passenger thus looking out upon, saw thus for the first time and the last? Who was she? Who was he? How long had they loved, and did they love each other very dearly, and would they go on loving each other evermore, or presently quarrel desperately and part for all eternity?

He thought then with a bitter smile of the course of Frank Pickering's true love, and with a sigh of his own journey and its object.

He found Ann on the sands. He had caught a glimpse of her slight figure among the rocks below, and descended the steps to speak to her. She was not crying as he had fancied at first from her attitude; for her head was resting on her hand, in which she held a pockethandkerchief tightly clutched. She did not hear him coming, and he obtained a view of her pale face and dull, lustreless eyes gazing out towards the sea.

He came towards her softly—the sound of his footsteps upon the sand drowned by the moaning of the wind—and laid his hand upon her shoulder. Then she turned and saw him for the first time, but did not seem startled by his sudden approach.

"You here!" she said, quietly. "How can you continue to care for anyone so unworthy, and after the way I have treated you?"

"It is because I love you," he answered, in a broken voice; "because I hope still against hope."

"There is no hope now."

"Why not?" he asked, passionately. "Oh, if you knew what a poor fool and shallow rascal this is you have wasted your love on—if you could see him with another's eyes—if you knew how basely he had acted, and for what a contemptible motive —so childish—so puerile—so——"

She put her hand upon his mouth.

"Do not talk like that," she said. "You can tell me nothing I do not know. You cannot dream how much at this moment I——I hate him!"

He caught her in his arms with a glow upon his face. But she shook herself free in a sort of angry terror, and ran towards the steps. He overtook her, and gained possession of her hand. Thus they stood for a moment, both breathless. The coming sea rolled and tumbled in the distance with a low, dull roar. It seemed like some strange music accompanying this strange scene.

"Ann—Ann, I was wrong. I was a fool to speak against him. After all, what have I to urge in my own behalf? What can I say except that I shall always love you—love you with a deeper love than it is possible for another to feel, for my love is a life old. Oh, Ann, how can I persuade you? I cannot find words to say half of what I think. This is the moment, I know, when I should be using every argument, when——"

"No, no!" she said; "you must say no more.

I am afraid I have been a fool. I see that now only too plainly; but it is too late for discoveries."

"Too late!"

"Yes, yes," she cried. "Too late!—too late!"

And following these words, which were uttered in a kind of wail, came a wild burst of sobbing, and she ran swiftly up the steps, leaving James Jarman silent and motionless, at their foot. As she disappeared he turned, and noticed that the night was falling fast, and that the roar of the coming sea was coming nearer and nearer.

18.

When it was quite dark, there came a knock at Mr. Starkey's house, and a gentleman asked to see Mr. Draper. He was told that Mr. Draper was very ill in bed, and had been so some weeks, and he seemed much surprised. He then asked if he could see Mrs. Draper, but was told that she had been out all the afternoon. He said he would like to wait for the lady, and was shown upstairs.

Left alone in the drawing-room, James threw himself into a chair, and rested his aching head upon his hand. Presently a moan from the next room attracted his attention. The door stood the least in the world ajar. A light was burning within, and he could steal a peep at its interior, unobserved. He rose, and went on tiptoe to look in.

There on the bed lay the man who had come between him and happiness. He was asleep, and a lamp burning near at hand threw deep shadows upon his face, which made it look more hollow-cheeked and ghastly even than it did in reality. His hair was long, and scattered wildly upon the pillow, contrasting strongly with the whiteness of his skin. So worn and emaciated did he seem, it was difficult to recognise any trace of the gay hearted, roystering

Don Cæsar of the Boudoir Theatre in his feeble frame and wasted features.

And this was the man whom she loved so fondly —who had only to raise his hand and beckon and she would follow. If what he had been told were true, it was more than doubtful that he would ever rise again from his sick bed.

"The poor gentleman has had a relapse since the lady went out," Mrs. Starkey had said; "and his friend Mr. Yolland has gone for the doctor. I'm very much afraid for him, sir. The doctor said if he had another attack it might be fatal."

As Jarman stood there watching, the sick man's head rolled to and fro uneasily, and his thin hands stretched forth upon the coverlet, clawed at it with restless fingers. He was delirious, or talking in his sleep. The listener caught vague snatches here and there.

"I must go on to-night. They're waiting for me. Has the music begun?"

He was at the amateur theatre, and another histrionic triumph awaited him. He was beating time now to some imaginary air, and nodded his head, and laughed faintly.

"Yes, yes, Tom; I understand perfectly. I'm not a fool, you know. I'm worthy of better things than this. I must not throw myself away."

Jarman smiled bitterly. "Here's a thing to talk about throwing itself away."

"Yes, yes; I know exactly the sort of life I shall shine in. It is fortunate it has not gone too far. It must be broken off."

He was silent for a moment, then laughed, and then the wasted hand approached the mouth, as though to twist the moustache in the way which had been so popular in the Don Cæsar performances.

"I know all that of course. From one point of view, of course, I am a villain. It is true, I have spared none. It was very cruel of me; it was indeed! I have led a fearfully wicked life."

The smile of contempt still played about Jarman's lip as he listened, but he could only hear a portion of these mutterings. Presently the tone of the sufferer changed altogether, and he began to plead pitifully for some one's mercy.

"I'm a pretender," he said; It's all a sham. I know you must despise me, but do not tell everybody. Promise me you will not tell. I have always told lies, and played the fool. I did love her really. It was to keep up my character. If I had not been ashamed—"

He muttered a broken sentence or two after this, and then subsided into total silence. James came away from the door and flung himself into the chair. Thus he sat waiting for about half an hour, and then in a voice louder and more distinct than before, the sick man awoke him from his reverie by calling "Ann, Ann!"

He raised himself and listened trembling.

The sick man called again,

"Where are you, Ann? Ann, my own darling, come and give me something to drink. Oh, I am dying with thirst. It is cruel of you to leave me to suffer like this all alone."

He seemed to speak naturally enough this time. He was not talking in his sleep. James Jarman rose and again approached the door, hesitated for a moment, and passed in.

VII.

OUTSIDE THE OLD BAILEY.

1.

THE news that things were not going on as satisfactorily as could have been wished with Mr. Starkey soon spread among the inhabitants of the little watering-place, and Mr. Starkey's old friends looked shily at him when they met him in the parlour of the Benbow or in the street. Since the lawsuit had been decided against him he drank rather deeper than usual, and was, if possible, more insolent and offensive in his manner towards mankind generally. It therefore occurred, not unnaturally, to Mr. Starkey's old friends that as he had no money to stand treat with and no conversation of an agreeable character to offer in its place, it was scarcely worth while putting up with his insults. Starkey, therefore, was sent to Coventry.

While in Coventry he drowned his sorrows in a bowl at his own expense, and staggered home late at night to beat his wife—a way he always had when in liquor. One particular night, when he was not quite as tipsy as usual because he had not quite money enough for the purpose, and when he had

for the same reason returned a trifle earlier than was his habit, he found great excitement prevailing in Paradise Place, and more particularly at Number One.

"Oh, Mr. Starkey," said a female neighbour, meeting him a few doors off. "Oh, so dreadful! The poor, young gentleman, and the poor young lady!"

"What has happened to them?"

What, indeed! There were all sorts of conflicting rumours abroad. One at least was dead; perhaps both. Mr. Starkey pushed his way past the little crowd with an air of authority and entered his house. Mrs. Starkey met him in the passage, in tears, and gave him a hurried account of what had happened. The gentleman upstairs had had a relapse, and while the lady and Mr. Yolland were out had breathed his last. The lady, when she returned and found what had happened, had taken on in a way which was dreadful to behold. She had screamed and cried like one distracted.

The doctor who had been sent for to see if anything could be done, stayed to render what assistance lay in his power to the lady, and fortunately, a relation of hers—who had called earlier in the evening to see her—had now come back again and volunteered to keep Mrs. Starkey company in sitting up to watch her, lest she might die for want of help in one of the series of fainting fits she had been seized with.

While Mr. Starkey and his wife were yet talking the doctor came down stairs and recommended the

latter to keep a sharp eye on the patient, who in her present excitable state it was not really safe to trust for a moment alone.

"I am afraid from what I can understand, there was some quarrel between her and her husband just before he died."

"I thought they were on such good terms," said Mrs. Starkey.

"Not they," Mr. Starkey interrupted. "There was a screw loose you may depend on it. I saw her come out of the house this afternoon, and by the look of her face it was plain enough to see there was something wrong. He was a bad lot, sir, you may depend upon it."

"How so?" the doctor asked; but Mr. Starkey contented himself by smiling mysteriously and shrugging his shoulders, which was a favourite custom of his when profoundly ignorant upon any subject, or when he wanted to give importance to some infinitesimal scrap of knowledge he chanced to have picked up. The doctor, a plump, rosy, simple little man, stared at him in surprise, made little out of the examination, and took his departure.

"A disagreeable, underhanded sort of fellow that," he said to himself as he walked away, and half an hour later had forgotten Mr. Starkey's existence.

When the door was shut behind him, Mr. Starkey had more to say:—"It's all very well this sitting up, and nursing and watching. Who's to pay for it all? We can't do the Good Samaritan business, you know. We have our own troubles to attend to?"

"Has anything fresh happened?"

"I don't know about anything fresh. Something will happen very soon, you may be sure of that. I'm just able to ward off the smash from day to day; but it will come. Your precious relations will sell us up before many more hours have passed over our heads. Mark my words if they don't."

This danger threatening did not however deter Mrs. Starkey from the performance of the kind office she had undertaken. She was very weary from a long day's work and the excitement and confusion of the last few hours, but she spoke not of her fatigue.

Ann had been put to bed in a room on the ground floor, where, as the night had turned cold, a fire was lit, on either side of which Jarman and the landlady seated themselves, and prepared to keep watch. It proved to be a dull business enough, and Mr. Starkey did not volunteer his help, but retired early to rest, and that not without complaining that he should have to sleep alone at the top of the house with a dead body in the room below.

This dread presence also made itself felt in the room where the watchers had taken up their posts, and seemed to lend an unwonted gloom and silence to the whole house. As they sat there hour after hour, they could hear faint noises from without—the murmur and splashing of the sea against the wooden break-water opposite. Now and then the howling

of a dog—at rare intervals a heavy footstep in the street—the tread of a passing fisherman going to his boat.

Within the room the suffering girl lay at times so perfectly motionless and quiet, she might have been dead. A kettle simmered and sang upon the hob, and an old-fashioned watch upon the mantelpiece ticked loudly in a little Gothic edifice, where it hung suspended from a nail beneath an archway, guarded by two little soldiers with drawn swords. Now and then some slight sound, at the moment inexplicable, occurring within the house itself, made the watchers hold their breath and listen.

When she had been keeping watch about three hours, the fatigues of the day began to tell upon Mrs. Starkey, and at last she nodded her head and slept in her arm-chair. Jarman opposite to her, still kept watch. The young widow at that moment was sleeping tranquilly. He alone, of all the inmates of the house, was awake. He sat and listened to the sufferer's regular breathing, glancing at frequent intervals at the face of the watch upon the mantelpiece, which marked the slow progress of time. Once he rose, and going noiselessly towards the window, gazed forth upon the sea, over which the day was just beginning to break.

Presently Ann turned her head quickly upon her pillow, and begun to mutter some incoherent words, and to throw out her arms. She was dreaming or delirious.

"I killed him—I killed him," she cried; "I hated him so, I killed him. Yes, it was I."

She had half started into a sitting posture as she spoke these words at the top of her voice. Next moment James was by her side, pressing her firmly back, and holding his hand before her mouth, as though to hinder her from speaking again.

"Hush! hush!" he whispered; "what are you doing? What are you saying?"

She leant back, and was silent, and leaving her, James Jarman stepped up to Mrs. Starkey's side and held the light before her eyes. The worthy landlady was fast asleep, and far from dreaming that the was in any particular danger.

When she awoke an hour or so later, day had broken; the fire had burnt low, and the candle sputtered in the socket. Ann slept more tranquilly, and James Jarman, more wakeful than ever, faced her from the other chimney corner, looking very grey and grim and haggard.

2.

The little doctor had prescribed a composing draught for Ann, and the long sleep thus induced, had had a beneficial effect. When she awoke she was calmer, aud more reasonable. She was, indeed, so calm and self-contained, the lookers marvelled a little at the change, and Mr. Starkey drew a moral when he heard of it.

"That's how it always is," said he, "they weep and tear their hair the first five-and-twenty minutes, and then it is all over, and we're forgotten." It would, however, have been somewhat difficult to forget a husband of the Starkey sort.

James Jarman took his departure early in the morning before the landlord had left his bed, so that as yet these two had not met nor were they indeed aware of each other's existence. When Ann opened her eyes she opened them upon the sad, silent figure of her cousin keeping watch. He came towards her, and gently took her hand in his.

"Well, Ann?"

"Are you here, James? You must not stop here," she said with a shudder.

"No, I only waited for an opportunity of speaking to you. Here on this card I have written my

address. Within a week I shall hope to see you. We will talk then of the future."

"She took the card he offered her, but made no reply, and without another word they parted thus. He slowly ascended the hill to the Royal Hotel, and there having made inquiries about the trains, ordered some breakfast. Whilst he was waiting for it, the friend with whom he had made the journey the day before entered the room. At sight of James he came forward, eagerly.

"Jarman! The very man I wanted to see!"

"How so?"

"I told you yesterday I was coming down here upon a spec I thought might turn out well for me. It has turned out badly!"

"That is a way specs have of turning out. Well?"

"Eighteen months ago I brought back with me to this cursed country a little fortune of twenty-three thousand pounds. Of that sum I have the odd three thousands remaining. From your talk yesterday it seemed to me you were heartily sick of England, and the life you were leading here."

"Yes, I am going away for ever in a few days!"

"Going where? What say you? Put in the same amount of money—a trifle to you—and join me in a venture out there in Mexico. I know you will like the scheme that I can lay before you. It is better than any I ever had. What say you to to the old free life again? We were so happy together once upon a time."

"Was I ever happy once upon a time?" said

James with a smile. "Well," he added after a pause, "I wont give you a promise yet; but it's not altogether unlikely. How long can you give me to decide?"

"Why, Jarman," cried the other, seizing his hand, "do you really mean it? Will your really come? Choose your own time, of course. I proposed the thing, it is true, but hardly hoped you would agree to it."

"The chances are I shall," James Jarman replied, without any manifestation of excitement. "The next few days will decide all."

"You know where to find me when you have made up your mind. And now, are you going up to town?"

"Yes, I want to see my lawyer at once. I have a good many things to settle."

"I see you are going to have breakfast. We will breakfast together, if you are agreeable, and we can go by the same train."

As, after the meal was concluded, there was an hour to spare, the two gentlemen strolled along the High Street, and stared into the shop windows, to pass the time away. A poor show of wares were those exhibited in the small tradesmen's windows in this watering-place, even in the full season, but now only a few odds and ends of the summer's stock remained. Nevertheless Jarman saw a leather pocket-book that took his fancy, and they went in to buy it.

The tradesman came forward with great alacrity to serve them. The article in question, he said,

was a bargain. It had been ordered by a nautical person, and had been procured with great trouble from town. The nautical person, after several visits, had gone away the day before the pocket-book arrived, and it was therefore thrown upon the shopkeeper's hands.

"It's worth double the money it's marked at, sir," he said. "The gent was most particular about it. When it's closed this way, you see, it's water-proof. You might, begging your pardon, sir, be drowned, and be under water for a day or two, and yet any papers in this pocket-book, if you had it on you at the time, would come out as dry as a bone."

While they were in the shop making this purchase, two suspicious-looking men, both, however, decently clad, looked in at the door, and one asked the shopkeeper to direct him to Paradise Place.

"It's down the street, right at the bottom, on the left. Who did you happen to want?"

"The name of Starkey. Do you know it?"

"Oh, certainly, that's number one—right opposite the breakwater."

"Starkey," said James, as he put away his purchase in the breast pocket of his coat. "I've heard that name before. Where was it now? Oh, I remember, it was long ago!"

The two suspicious-looking men went their way, as directed, and reaching number one in due course, knocked at the door. The door being opened, he

who had knocked immediately put his foot and leg into the passage to prevent the door being closed again, and asked for Mr. Starkey.

Mr. Starkey appearing, it seemed that there was a claim against him for a trifle over two hundred pounds, which one of this couple wanted to know whether he was going to pay. Mr. Starkey replying, with a dismal laugh, that he did not think he had any intention of doing anything of the kind, the speaker informed him that he should leave his friend in charge, and having done so himself took his departure. Mr. Starkey's troubles had then commenced in earnest. This was the smash of which he had been for some time past in daily expectation.

The smash having come, he left Mrs. Starkey "to have her cry out," and went down to the Benbow to drown his own care in his own way. He was some time thus occupied, and it was late in the afternoon, when he turned his face again towards home. In front of the door he found standing one of the flies from the railway, loaded up with boxes. At first he thought his own goods and chattels were being moved away.

But this impression was quickly banished by a lady's calling to him from the coach window.

"Oh, if you please, my good man."

Mr. Starkey replied, somewhat resentfully:

"What can I do for you, ma'am?"

"Does Mr. Draper live here?"

Mr. Starkey looked hard at the lady, in whose

face he thought he could trace some likeness to his late lodger.

"He did live here."

"Has he gone then? Where to?"

Mr. Starkey looked up at the sky and down at the pavement, as though uncertain upon this point, and bit his thumb.

"Are you a relation of Mr. Draper's, ma'am?"

"I am his mother."

"You haven't heard what has happened, then?"

"Happened? Oh! my poor Harry. Let me get out."

There was a dark, good-looking gentleman, with very fine whiskers, sitting in the fly with Mrs. Draper, upon the opposite seat.

He spoke now for the first time, interposing in a soft and persuasive tone, and gently possessing himself of the lady's wrist as he did so.

"We must not agitate ourselves. We must be calm and brave, and prepared for anything."

Mr. Starkey told his tale in the style peculiar to him, putting the worst construction upon things. He supposed that he and Mrs. Starkey would never get any return for all they had gone through on the poor young man's account—the sleepless nights they had had—the long hours of watching—the toil and anxiety. He owed rent, too, for some weeks.

The lady alighted and entered the house, sobbing. Mrs. Starkey joined her shortly:

"How did my poor boy die? When was it?" Mrs. Draper asked her.

"It was last night about nine when the young

lady came back, and he must have been dead then. She sat, she said, for some time in the drawing-room—nearly two hours—thinking he was asleep, and that he would wake and call for her; and at last, finding he did not wake and call, went in to look at him."

"How strange she should stop away from him so long, when she knew he was so ill."

"Very strange, I think," Mr. Starkey observed, parenthetically.

"I think," Mrs. Starkey continued, "that the lady and gentleman must have quarrelled during the afternoon."

"Where is this woman? Who is she? My son was not married."

"He wouldn't marry her, that's why she went away and left him," said Mr. Starkey. "When she heard he was ill, though, she came back and forced him into it. They were married by special licence. He was so ill at the time, he could hardly make the responses."

Mrs. Starkey would have interrupted—"Oh, I don't think that, dear—"

"Hold your tongue," replied her husband. "You know nothing about it."

"What doctor attended Mr. Draper?" asked the strange gentleman, who had accompanied the lady into the house, and who it appeared was a doctor also. "I must see him at once. I should like to put some questions to him. If you will take my advice, my dear madam, you will take up your quarters, for the present, at the hotel."

"But I must see him. After what I have suffered coming over. Ah! I feel that I shall never recover this shock."

"As your medical adviser, I must forbid you, madam, to excite yourself any more at present. I must beg of you to come away at once."

Mr. Yolland was yet in the town, and came to the hotel, where Mrs. Draper had put up, to narrate such circumstances as he was acquainted with respecting his friend's last hours. With some reluctance he related the principal points of the conversation he had had with Draper, which Ann had overheard.

"When I gave this advice," Yolland hastened to add, "you will, I trust, believe that I had no idea your son was married to the lady."

"Married!" cried Mrs. Draper, in great excitement. "I do not believe that the marriage was legal. Who was present, I should like to know? We have all heard of these designing creatures."

Mrs. Draper's medical friend here burst into the room. He was trembling, and white with rage.

"What is the matter, Doctor Francis?"

"I have never been so insulted in all my life," he replied, dragging off his gloves, and flinging them into his hat, as he spoke; "I have called upon this fellow—this low provincial apothecary. The man was not even civil. He wished to know by what right I interfered; but I will show him that. It was easy at a glance to see how wholly incompetent the creature was; but I'll let him see whom

he has got to deal with. I am resolved on the part I shall take in the matter."

Later on, Mr. Yolland and Doctor Francis had a few words together.

"The whole business seems to me extremely suspicious."

"Suspicious is a strong word," said Yolland.

"Not too strong. But this is premature. We shall see after the examination."

"Examination?"

"Decidedly. After the post-mortem examination."

Was it possible that the few words Mr. Starkey had let fall carelessly could have led to the brewing of such a storm, for a storm *was* brewing—a raging storm, to which one life at least will fall a sacrifice?

"I'd like to set them all by the ears, curse them!" said Mr. Starkey.

"Why?" his wife asked.

"We've got our troubles, haven't we? Why shouldn't they have theirs?"

"But they have, dear!"

"Oh, yes, I daresay. I shouldn't wonder now, if, before a month's over, the two women are hard at it, tooth and nail. The old one will want to throw over the young one's claim. But she can't do that. For that matter, she was safe enough while he had lived, even without the second marriage. He would never have dared to pretend the

first a sham one. I would have shown her how to manage it, but she would not take my advice."

"I hope they will not be able to cheat her out of her share of what property there is."

"Why so? I do not see that it's any business of yours, or mine either. They could only do it though with our help. If we proved now that he was of unsound mind, and had been so ever so long."

"But he wasn't."

"Wasn't he? Well, if he wasn't, what of that? I don't know that he wasn't though, yet. I shall see what turn things take, and then I'll give my opinion. I'm sure I don't mind which way it is myself."

Late over night a message had been sent to an old woman living in a back street of the town; and very early in the morning she had come, and in a stealthy and noiseless fashion, which had something horribly suggestive about it, performed certain offices in the darkened chamber upstairs. This creature had also swept up and tidied the dead man's room at Mr. Starkey's request, and brought down in her hand a dust-shovel full of litter. Sorting this over in her husband's presence, Mrs. Starkey said,—

"Here's a piece of paper with some writing on it. What's it about, I wonder?"

Starkey snatched it.

"Let me see."

It was a half-sheet of note paper, on which only a few words had been written in straggling and un-

certain characters, which were difficult to decipher; but Starkey changed colour as he read it, and rising, approached the window, keeping his back turned on his wife.

"What is it, dear?"

"What's what?"

"The paper."

"Oh, nothing—nothing. You never told me——"

"Told you what?"

"Nothing."

3.

Once roused, the energy of this Doctor Francis seemed to be without bounds. He was heard raving loudly against the low provincial apothecary in the public room at the Royal. That fellow had better have a care. He (Francis) was not to be trifled with. All in good time!

The country doctor meanwhile went upon his rounds, dreaming of no danger. When he heard from a friend that there had been "a doctor from London up there at the 'Royal' pooh-poohing his medical skill," the good old gentleman only smiled.

"My patients know me by this time, I've brought half the parish into the world. I suppose I've not made more mistakes than my betters. Perhaps he wants to come down here and settle. He wont find it a very good spec, I'm afraid."

The old gentleman went home that night and told the story to his wife and daughters over his glass of port. He thought it, in the innocence of his heart, to be rather a good story. He little dreamt what was coming.

As the sagacious reader may have guessed from the first, that man Francis was, to a certain extent, a charlatan and impostor. He was not very clever professionally; but he was a great schemer, and

though as a rule aiming but at paltry results, threw so much artfulness into his game, that he frequently came off victorous—for a time at least. He had not come from London as stated above, but from the French watering-place, where Mrs. Draper had been living for some months past. He had sold his practice and was going to London with the intention of settling there, and called on his patient to inform her of his intention. The prospect of a travelling companion decided Mrs. Draper to go and see her son, and as the doctor had some few days to spare, he proposed to accompany her to the seaside, and to give his advice in the case.

Some people said that he had other views with regard to the widow, who was reported to be tolerably well off. Perhaps he wanted to see whether the son was likely to live, and if so what sort of person he was; or whether he was likely to die, and if so to whom the money would go. Arriving in the little watering-place he had at once taken a great fancy to it. There was only one doctor there —an old man. There might be a chance for a young one.

Perhaps the old doctor suspected his intentions when first they met. There was of course no reason why every information should not have been afforded him respecting all the circumstances attending Harry Draper's illness and death; but the inquiries had been put somewhat insolently, and the old gentleman's anger was roused. Had not this been the case, the truth would never have come to light.

Tom Yolland could not help feeling a little surprised at the marked antipathy Mrs. Draper manifested towards her son's widow when he recollected the letter the former lady had written. "How was it she had changed her opinions so decidedly?" he asked himself. In the first place, however, he reflected that she was naturally suspicious of all surrounding the loved one who had died. Starkey's ill-natured words had helped towards the result. Presently came the damning proofs.

When the scared hound flies panting past with frothy mouth, lolling tongue, and bloodshot eyes, a howling crowd yelling "mad dog!" at his heels, which of us pauses to inquire whether the beast is really as mad as its pursuers suppose? To escape from its reach or to strike it dead, what other thought have we regarding it? When the post-mortem examination had taken place,—when the little scraps of evidence had been gathered together—when Yolland's story had been told—when the first whisper of foul play and poison had gone forth, who doubted the guilt of the culprit?

Even before the proofs were deduced the rumour had gained ground in the town. In the public room at the Royal it had been talked over. In at the Benbow it had been discussed. There never before had been a murder at this little watering-place. A man had killed another in a stand-up fight in a little village a mile and a half away, but that happened thirteen years ago, and then it was only brought in manslaughter. There had not been so much general

excitement, even at regatta time, for many seasons past.

Having no other topic to converse upon, the landladies of the empty houses met together, and lengthily discoursed upon the subject in front of their tradesmen's counters. The fishermen gathered together in knots at the street corners. All day long a little crowd might be seen gazing up at the front of the house.

The local police were in a state of the highest indignation. A detective and two London officers had come down. These had given themselves great airs, and poohpoohed local authorities and traditions. The magistrates of the borough and of the county had come together, and got by the ears over the business. There was a talk of the trial being moved to London. Some of the well-informed ones repudiated this intelligence with contempt; but eventually it turned out to be correct, for the trial was removed to London, on the ground that owing to the prejudice prevailing against the prisoner in the district, it would be impossible to have a fair trial there.

A month had now passed since Harry Draper died. The house stood damp and desolate in Paradise Place, destined perhaps to stand empty for many seasons to come, for clearly it will henceforth be an ill-omened house, and an unlucky house, which no prudent person would venture on taking. All good folks shudder as they pass it now, and many will not pass it after dark.

That window over the balcony, the broken window, is where she used to sit among the flowers. There's a broken piece of one of the very flowerpots lying there now if you doubt the story. Her little white hand used to steal out among the flowers and wave adieu to him as he walked up the High Street. He whom she waved adieus to lies buried yonder in the graveyard on the top of the hill. The hand she waved was the same hand that poured out the poison.

Only a few weeks ago, and that was the lightest and brightest house of the row. It has been shut up only a few days, and it looks as though it had been deserted for months. One or two blades of the straw which was used in the packing up of Mr. Starkey's goods and chattels still cling persistently to the doorstep. Where are the Starkeys gone? Over the way are the rails Mr. Starkey used to sit on so long, and on which he smoked so many pipes. One rail is bent with Mr. Starkey's weight. The paint is worn from a lower one by the friction of his boot soles. Yes, there are Mr. Starkey's marks, but where, oh! where is Mr. Starkey?

When the female neighbours talk it over they have a hundred and one anecdotes to relate respecting the inmates of the Starkeys' drawing rooms. There was always a something—it was difficult to say what, but a certain something—about her nobody had liked. Some had always suspected she would turn out badly; some had seen the crime foreshadowed in her face; others had shuddered in her presence.

What of him who lay there dead in the little churchyard yonder? So handsome a gentleman! so light-hearted! so free spoken, so generous of his money, so noble too to atone for his fault upon his deathbed, and to render her so grand a reparation!

What a change! Here is the street that used to be so gay, now sad and silent. There is the sea the ladies used to bathe in, smooth as a duck-pond at that time, or rippling gently beneath the summer's sun, now black and boisterous, thundering in upon the crazy woodwork of the pier, and eating its way into the chalky cliffs which then stood high and dry above high water-mark. Yonder, No. 1 shut up and left to the ghosts and the rats; the hero dead and buried, the heroine a prisoner in Newgate.

4.

The sun rose much as usual one December day, which was a day of great importance to certain persons in this history, and lighted up the ordinary London street-life in its customary fashion. The shops were opened about the usual time. People went about their business, made arrangements about their dinner, and felt in their usual spirits. There was no visible difference in the density of the traffic upon Ludgate Hill or in Cheapside. Round and about Newgate prison the public houses were not quite as full as on some busy market-days. There were a good many policemen standing about, and some bustle among the barristers, their touters and attornies, about the doors of the court. A few more idlers than common loitered about the Old Bailey, and now and then among them might be seen a pale, wistful face—the face of a friend of one on his trial within, for to-day the Sessions were sitting, and it was a question of life or death for some inside those walls.

There are some cases which, owing more to accident than any peculiarity of their own, excite a large share of public notice. On these occasions the court is often crowded, and the seats available to the public eagerly appropriated; but very rarely is

there even half the excitement in a real trial which invariably characterizes the trials of romance. There is so much else to think of, how are we who are not upon our trial to remember when the case comes on. Why, there are some people tried and condemned, with more or less justice, and hanged out of the way, and we none the wiser, because on the days that those events were recorded we did not happen to read the newspaper. Just at that period many important events had occurred to engross the public mind—war, a general election, fierce political strife. Upon this account, perhaps, the reports of the proceedings hitherto had been very meagre. Many details which might have provoked curiosity had been omitted. The world at large knew very little of Harry Draper's murder, and of his wife's trial for the crime.

Some of the idlers in the street without were not aware that a case of such importance was coming on. Most of those who had business on hand regarding cases in the court, even though those cases were only trivial ones, were so engrossed with their own affairs, they had no time or inclination to think of others. A sallow-faced man, with a ragged beard, who was wandering vaguely round the prison walls, had some difficulty in ascertaining whether there actually was a trial for murder about to take place, and where it would occur. Whilst he was himself looking for the court door, a rustic-looking stranger came up and asked if he could point out the spot where the "chap were hung." Replying in an absent manner that he did not know and passing on,

the man with the beard, a minute afterwards, found the rustic stranger still at his elbow.

"I be coom oop to Lunon to see th' soits loike, don't 'ee see. I be coom into a bit a brass and 'ud loike to spend it on a lark."

If anything, perhaps, the rusticity of the stranger was a trifle overdone, and strongly suggestive of skittle-grounds and sporting wagers. The other turned away impatiently and hurried on. A few yards further on he met an old man with a profusion of grey locks hanging down upon his collar. He was carrying some papers and pressing forward absorbed in his own thoughts.

"Mr. Drake."

"Ah, Mr. Jarman."

"What is going on? How's the case likely to go? Has anything fresh occurred?"

"Nothing fresh—nothing done yet. We may hope for a favourable result."

"May hope? You said an acquittal was certain."

"Of course nothing is certain in this world; but I think I may say nearly certain—next to certain."

"You know, Mr. Drake, I told you when I came to you at first why I came. I was recommended to go to the cleverest Old Bailey lawyer in London; I knew you were the man, and came to you."

Mr. Drake, grinning at the intended compliment, but wincing somewhat at the way in which it was put, hastened to reply.

"I hope you did not do wrong, sir; I'm sure we

lose very few cases from our office, and we have a deal of business—a great deal. Hi, Jeff!"

The person so addressed was a little foxy man, carrying a blue bag tightly crammed with papers. He came running towards them in answer to his name.

"Have you seen after Saunders's case?" said Drake, "and Williams's? Here's something for you to attend to at once. Go back to the office and fetch Pledger's affidavit."

"Yes, sir,——"

"Stop; what have you got in the bag? let me look."

They were standing in a passage leading into the court when this dialogue took place. People were pushing to and fro past them. Some of the papers that the lawyer was sorting were knocked from his hands by some rough person passing by, and scattered on the ground. Jarman looked on, scowling with impatience while the documents were picked up again.

"I am afraid you have too much other business, to attend to mine," he said.

"Why, my dear sir, yours will be attended to all in good time. Pray make your mind easy—do make your mind easy."

"That is easy enough to say. This suspense is unendurable."

"But there is really no cause for alarm."

"You really mean that the result must be favourable?"

"I have not a doubt of it."

The other groaned. "Why did I leave it as long as this? There was only one course to pursue: I ought to have done it long ago."

"My dear sir, you seem very excited; that is natural of course; but pray try and compose yourself. Suppose now you go to my office, and sit down and wait. I will at once communicate the result."

With these words, Mr. Drake was for running away again, having by this time collected together his scattered papers. Jarman caught at his sleeve.

"My dear sir," said the lawyer, "I—really—my dear—sir——" and he tried to disengage himself from the other's grasp.

"One moment," said Jarman, tightening his hold, and speaking in a low, earnest tone. "You have other cases on to-day; you did not tell me that. I depended wholly on your help—your undivided attention to this case."

"But, my dear sir—so unreasonable a request—so unprofessional——"

"Chut! Listen to what I have to say. I told you you were to spare no expense."

Here Jeff the clerk interrupted.

"Williams's case is on, sir."

Mr. Drake shook himself violently loose.

"I must go, upon my word. Really, I protest!"

But once more the other had him tight. "There was something really dangerous about the look of the man," the lawyer afterwards explained when describing the scene; "a sort of subdued ferocity. I was really almost alarmed."

If the truth must be told, the worthy gentleman was alarmed in reality, and without any further effort abandoned himself to his fate, and listened to what Jarman had to say.

"I told you not to spare any expense," he continued, "and to obtain the best counsel that could be procured."

"I did so. Samson was not able to take the brief, as luck would have it, or Sergeant David. I got Goliah, though. After David he is the next best."

"No matter what you did. So far it seems there has been nothing but bad luck. I don't say though that it is your fault. All I say is this—I want your undivided attention, and now tell me in one word what sum will make it worth your while to throw everything else over, and give me your whole time for the day. Name the sum and I will write you out a cheque."

"Never since I began to practise," Mr. Drake said, when telling the story, "did I hear so monstrous a proposition. Of course I could not listen to it."

* * * * * * *

"My dear sir! Really, this way of treating the matter! Of course, if you are willing—in the shape of a retaining fee, as it were—but if I could only persuade you to be calm. There is a pen and ink at this desk. Mr. Dawson, could you oblige me? Thank you—thank you."

* * * * * * *

"And now, my dear sir, you really must be

calm. Our case is on the next. Will you come into the court or wait here? Wait here—that's right. Now I will come back to you directly, if you will only promise to be reasonable."

"I will be as patient as I can," the other said. "If you knew what I suffered!"

"But you must be calm," Mr. Drake urged. "Consider, my dear sir, what can your sufferings be to hers?"

Where Jarman stood, just outside a door leading into the court, he could hear the confused murmur of the voices within when the door was closed, and every now and then catch a few disjointed sentences when the door opened. Sometimes when the voice of one of the witnesses was low, it was altogether inaudible without. Then again, when the business of the court was suspended, there was a general whispering, which presently the voice of the usher quelled. The case was a short one, and easily disposed of—highway robbery and attempted murder—several previous convictions—penal servitude for life.

Some of the spectators from the court passed out at the door. Two barristers, one coming out, one going in, met in front of him, and talked together.

"What's on next?"

"Murder!"

"The woman down at that seaside place, who killed her husband, isn't it? They'll soon settle that."

"Yes, I should think so. No case. Wonder they found a true bill; but they must acquit her."

They passed on their different ways, and Jarman heaved a sigh.

Just at his elbow a remarkably long-winded old man was telling a friend an interminable story. Throughout the whole time that Jarman stood there waiting anxiously this story continued, and involuntarily he found himself listening to snatches of it.

"It was just this way, you see—the man either did commit the murder or he didn't. It was all a question of time and place. If he were at a certain place at a certain time it looked black against him; but then his side tried to prove he wasn't at this place at this time. A case of alibi, you see."

* * * * * * *

A loud gabble of voices heard from the court, suddenly hushed by the sharp clear voice of the usher. Then the door had closed again. Two more barristers had come out and lingered to talk a moment.

"This won't take more than an hour at most. There is just time to go and get some lunch."

"I'm quite willing. There's nothing interesting in this thing. I read the evidence over."

"Nothing fresh going to be brought forward, I suppose?"

"Not that I've heard of. Sure to be acquitted."

They went their way still chatting. Two other legal gentlemen came hurrying up, and one, red-

faced and good-humoured, was laughing at a joke the other was telling him. Some one standing by Jarman's side whispered—

"That's Goliah."

"Which?" asked Jarman, eagerly.

The person he addressed did not catch the question. He had to repeat it, and by that time the barrister had disappeared. As Jarman pushed forward the person in charge of the door refused him admittance.

Meanwhile the story was going on:—"It was this way, you see—Was the woman to be believed or was she not? She swore most positively the man never did call at the hour he stated; but then could she positively swear to a circumstance so many months afterwards? The other woman, again, the one who lived next door, swore just as solemnly the other way, and how could she be sure? Now both the women swore that for some reason or other they happened to be watching the clock that particular hour that particular day. It was very strange—but one meets with strange things of the sort often enough."

* * * * * *

The door of the Court opened for a moment, and a deep impressive voice was heard speaking alone. This was the Attorney-General opening the case.

"The prisoner at the bar was in the habit of giving the deceased all his medicines. Some of the same poison from which he met his death was known

to be kept in the medicine-chest in the room, and was found in that chest standing open on a side-table——"

A fussy little man carrying a piece of paper in his hand pushed his way through the crowd to the door just as it closed behind another man coming out. The man coming out called to the other by name—

"Addleton."

"Ah! You are the very party I wanted. I've got an order to pass me in here. I'm afraid I'm late. That woman's trial is on to-day, is it not. The woman who killed poor Draper."

"They're trying her now to find out whether she did or not. I think not, myself."

"Oh, she did, you may depend on it. Poor Draper! By the way, who is the attorney for the prosecution? I've something I can tell him. You must know this woman was a near relation of that preaching man, Bradshaw."

"You don't mean that?"

"I do though. Now the fellow's got a spite against me. I can't tell you why just at this moment. It's such a precious long story; but I am determined the fact of the relationship shall be made public."

The man with the interminable tale was still hard at it.

"Now you see the clocks all agreed, and that, Serjeant David maintained, was the weak point in the case for the prosecution. He argued is was so

unlikely that four clocks, and all of them cuckoos, could tally to the moment, and it was a question of moments, you see. Oh, he's a downy card, is David. There's no one like him. If he'd been on the other side the fellow would have been hung to a certainty."

* * * * * *

A man close by who had caught the last words of the last speaker asked a bystander, "Is it not David speaking now?"

"Yes, that's him sure enough."

"How will this case go?"

"Guilty of course. I saw by the judge's face he'd made *his* mind up before he heard a word. They don't often hang women now though, do they?"

"Oh, don't they though."

The opening speech was over. The confused gabble arose again. Then the Usher's clear voice was heard shouting silence, and then a name was called out.

"Thomas Yolland."

Some more people came out, talking as they came.

"Did you get a sight of her where you stood? Not good-looking is she?"

"No, not at all good-looking. Very white and sickly; seems to be in bad health."

"Poor creature. Don't believe she did it."

"Nonsense. Not a doubt of it."

Others came out in a few minutes.

"The case is as good as broken down already."

"I don't know that I should say so though if an enlightened British jury was not trying it. If there's a chance of them making fools of themselves, depend upon it they wont let the opportunity slip."

The tale was still in progress:—"The question was, could he or could he not have done the distance in three minutes and a half? If these clocks were right, he had seven minutes to do it in. (Don't you see the point?) But if, as David argued, some of them were wrong, or all of them were wrong, and the only reliable clock was that at the railway station, why then he had only three minutes and a half."

* * * * * *

Yolland had given his evidence. Mrs. Draper was called, and then Doctor Francis. Mr. Drake came out of the court for a moment to speak to his client. Jarman fairly gasped for breath when he saw him, and caught at his hand as a drowning man might catch at a floating fragment of wreck.

"Well, well, what do you think?"

"There must be an acquittal. Pray be calm and leave it to me. All that can be done is being done, rest assured of that."

"Yes, yes, of course; I know after your promise you will do all you can. There, there, excuse me. God knows I try to be patient."

Mr. Drake turned to go again. The other stopped him.

"Are our witnesses here? Will you want me?"

"No, no. Our counsel is not in favour of calling any. He will let the case stand on its own merits, and knock all the other side's evidence to pieces. Make your mind quite easy, we are certain to win the day."

He was gone again. The case for the prosecution was over. The counsel for the defence had risen. Jarman, leaning against the wall, closed his eyes, and seemed to be unconscious of all that was passing around him. Addleton came out of the court, looked towards him, started, and stood still. Jarman opened his eyes at the moment and called him by name.

"Good heavens are you ill?" the other asked. "How you are altered. This sad case, I suppose. Well, well, we must hope for the best."

"How do they seem to think it will go?"

"I do not know. But you must not despair yet —I am so sorry—I must be getting on."

He got away as quickly as possible. The door swung to and the counsel's voice became inaudible. Close to Jarman's ear the interminable tale was going on the same as ever. Had it always been going on? Had it ceased for a time, and had the speaker gone away and returned again? Had the trial been one or several hours in progress? These were questions he asked himself, but for which he could find no answer. In a dreamy way he listened to the story.

"The way it was done was this. He must have

got in at the window, taken the old woman unawares, killed her by a blow on the back of the head, and let himself out again by the door, which had been locked on the inside. Now, if the clocks were right, you see, he did all this in less than five minutes."

* * * * *

The speech proceeded, reached its termination, and at some applause Jarman started forward.

"What was that?" he asked eagerly. "Is it the verdict?"

But the person coming out whom he had addressed undeceived him.

"Not quite, but nearly as good. The whole case has broken down. Upon such evidence it will be perfectly impossible to convict."

"Thank God!" muttered Jarman, and once more leant back against the wall and closed his eyes. Mr. Drake touched him on the arm.

"The judge is summing up. We are all right now."

He turned back again after hastily whispering these words. Some more people came out of the court; others went in. The interminable tale was still in progress, but this time the words fell without meaning upon Jarman's ears. The judge was speaking now, he heard some one say. People pushed backwards and forwards past him in and out the door. He fixed his eyes wildly upon their faces, and now and then his lips moved as though asking a question.

The judge's even tones still struck his ear whenever the court door opened. At last they stopped. A bustle and loud murmurs within betokened the end of his address. Some broken sentences from those crowding out showed what had taken place.

"Dead against her."

"Never knew anything like it."

"Left them nothing for it but a verdict of guilty."

"Dead against her."

"Dead against the prisoner!"

Trembling in every limb, with wildly-dilated eyes, with lips which, though parted as in speech, yet gave out no sound, Jarman waited and listened. Drake did not come, but some one brought him a line scribbled inside an envelope. He tried to read, but the letters danced confusedly before his eyes, and the paper fell to the ground.

Now again there was silence within the court. The jury had returned. A moment's pause—

GUILTY!

The people were forcing their way out. Jarman rushed forward, wildly waving his arms.

"She's innocent!" he gasped out almost inaudibly. "I will speak!"

Drake coming forward caught him round the waist. Others closed round. His teeth were set, his eyes bloodshot, his hands clenched; the blood trickled down from the corners of his mouth.

"The man's in a fit," some one said; "carry him out into the open air."

They carried him out, therefore, struggling and

gasping. A few moments afterwards he lay quiet enough,—he had fainted.

The passers-by wondered what ailed the gentleman. He was carried into an adjoining chemist's shop, and a small crowd following hung about the door, and peeped in at the window between the coloured bottles. But very few noticed this little incident, and then other people in the street bustled along, fully occupied with their own affairs, many not even glancing towards the gloomy gaol, where at that moment the sentence of death was being passed—

"*To be taken back to the place from whence you came, and thence to a place of execution, there to be hanged by the neck until you shall be dead, and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul!*"

VIII.

INSIDE NEWGATE.

1.

THE trial was over now. All that could be done had been done. All the predictions that had been made had been falsified by what had taken place. It was but small consolation to those most deeply interested to know that, in spite of all law and justice, the verdict had been given against the prisoner, and the sentence passed. Ann was to die.

There had been no recommendation to mercy. Next day the papers were so full of the visit of that foreign prince to the City, of which mention has already been made, that the report of the trial was necessarily curtailed. The world at large had other matters to occupy it besides the fate of one wretched woman lying prisoner in Newgate, who was to be hanged by-and-by—three Mondays hence.

It seemed more than probable that the execution would take place, and the body be interred within the prison walls, before the public began to wake up to the fact that this little tragedy had been played out without an audience, in a quiet corner, and no one the wiser. How was it that this trial excited so little interest? Who can tell?

By some fatality this murder had not been a "popular" one, and now it was only by accident that public attention was directed to it. Poor ill-advised William Bradshaw wrote a leading article in the *Thirsty Soul* against a recently published novel by Little Addleton. This was not the first time Mr. Bradshaw's organ had attacked this popular writer. He vowed vengeance, and at once set about its accomplishment.

Two days after the trial a paragraph appeared in the town letter of a country paper stating the relationship existing between Mr. Bradshaw and the condemned prisoner in Newgate. Within a week the paragraph had been copied into almost every London paper. A vague statement partly contradicting the story appeared in the *Thirsty Soul* on Saturday, which confirmed the truth in the minds of those who doubted, and made many thousands acquainted with the fact who otherwise would never have heard of it.

A furiously satirical reply appeared within a day or two in one of the comic journals. Another paper in want of a subject took up the case. Another reviewed the whole story of the murder, and indignantly called attention to the unfair summing up of the judge. A rush of letters from correspondents immediately followed, and before the week was out the whole town was discussing the crime and trial of Ann Draper.

Nothing could have happened more unfortunately as far as William Bradshaw's worldly prospects were concerned. The new chapel long talked of had not

yet been built, owing to some disagreement among the gentlemen to whom the management of the business had been intrusted. Whilst the dispute was at its highest the bank broke where the money already subscribed had been deposited. The new chapel then never would be built unless fresh subscriptions were raised; and this seemed doubtful, for somehow William Bradshaw's popularity was just a little on the wane.

Just at this moment a new preacher was founding a new sect, right under the noses of the Chosen Few in the same parish. His style was directly opposite to that of William. His was not the familiar and free-and-easy, but the deeply sonorous and denunciatory. He thundered forth terrors of bottomless pits and raging furnaces. Every Sunday his chapel was filled with frightened women, who screamed and fainted and were carried out, only to return in a week to scream and faint again. His popularity was enormous; and William's benches were not nearly as full as they were wont to be. This was all the greater misfortune for William, because unhappily the bulk of his wife's fortune had been lost in the same bank that had swallowed up the subscriptions. The remainder was invested in the *Thirsty Soul*, the circulation of which was not as good as it had been some time ago.

One day William Bradshaw came home white with rage, brandishing a newspaper in his hand.

His wife began to grumble at the time he had kept the dinner waiting.

"Hold your tongue, woman," he said, (they had

quarrelled a good deal lately). "Do you think I have any appetite for dinner after this? Look there! Read that! They are bent upon our ruin!"

He pointed as he spoke to an article in a serious journal, expressing its astonishment that the near relation of a condemned murderess could be allowed to preach the gospel even to such a congregation as gathered together in his obscure chapel. Before the woman was hanged he would surely, the journal said, if he had any deceny left, withdraw himself from the public gaze.

"Before she is hanged," cried William bitterly. "To think that I should have lived to suffer such humiliation! Retire, indeed! That is true enough. But what dark corner shall we find wherein to hide our disgrace?"

The next morning, after a sleepless night, William Bradshaw arose pale and haggard, but calmer than he had been for some days. He had come to a determination, and set off at an early hour for the city. Here he found out the counsel who had conducted the defence, and, after a brief interview, was referred by him to Mr. Drake's office. He had come, he told the latter gentleman, to see whether any steps could be taken in "this distressing business," and if so, to say that he was willing to pay expenses.

Mr. Drake informed him that steps were being taken, as it was, and the case was being conducted with great energy. A representation had been forwarded to the Secretary of State. A flaw had been

discovered in the legal details. A review of the case was hoped for, which must undoubtedly result in establishing Ann's innocence. As for the money, said Mr. Drake, somewhat contemptuously eyeing a crumpled five-pound-note the minister had produced from his purse, Mr. Jarman had already deposited a hundred pounds towards the current expenses.

Mr. Bradshaw put away his money in confusion, but felt relieved in his mind. "Where was Mr. Jarman?" he asked.

"Strange to say, I cannot tell you," replied the lawyer. "For two days he has disappeared. He certainly ought to be here. It is, indeed, very inconvenient and unfortunate. I want his directions before I can act."

These words were to a certain extent prophetic of the disasters to come. The week passed slowly away and yet Jarman did not make his appearance. The money was already exhausted and large sums would still be required, Mr. Drake said, and he wrote to William asking whether he was now inclined to advance funds, but his affairs were already in a crippled state. He must raise the money himself before he could advance it, even if he made up his mind to do so.

"Money," screamed Mrs. Bradshaw. "What for? Indeed you shall not. Not a penny of mine shall go to such a cause."

"Silence," he shouted in return. "Do you know that her death will be our disgrace."

"Is there no other way?"

"Only one."

"She pressed him to tell her what this one was; but he blushed deeply and was silent. Later on he yielded to her solicitation.

"I am told that Ann's health has suffered greatly since she has been in prison. If the inquiry be prosecuted at some length, she may probably die a natural death before the day arrives.

2.

The murder at the little watering-place was by this time really the town's talk. The newspapers one after another took up the story and rang the changes upon it. Some professed unbounded belief in Ann's innocence, and one, though allowing the probability of her guilt, boldly espoused her cause and protested that the dastard who had met his death from her hand only too richly deserved his fate.

And yet the few days Ann had still to live passed quickly by, and in spite of all the talk nothing seemed to be done. The document spoken of as being forwarded to the Secretary of State had not three days before the fatal Monday left Mr. Drake's office. Jarman had not yet returned. Money was wanted, and the whole business was being muddled for want of it.

Saturday came at last. William had raised a sum sufficient for the present to appease the legal wolves. The memorial was on its way to the secretary's country seat, under charge of a special messenger. The day passed and no reply was returned. On Sunday morning the congregation at William's chapel waited in vain for their minister. He had gone to Newgate to bid the prisoner farewell.

As he passed through the street he saw many people loitering about and peering up at the prison walls. Were they already gathering together to take their places for the show? The execution, was of course, as this occurred some years ago, to be a public one. The fact that it was a woman who was to die increased the number of the sight-seers. Although there was a rumour of a probable reprieve, before dusk a large crowd had assembled, and the taverns round about were densely crowded.

It was said that the windows had let well. A young nobleman had taken one. Surely, not a young nobleman—a counter-skipper—a shop boy, perhaps. Not so. A real nobleman had paid for his window just as my lord Tom Noddy did, about whom Ingoldsby sang in past times; and early in the evening his lordship came there with his friends—Lieutenant Tregooze was he one of them? and Sir Carnaby and the rest? Yes; they were all there, or their prototypes, you may be sure.

And why not? A party of literary gentlemen had taken another window. Little Addleton, Yolland, several others besides, who had come there in pursuit of character—for a literary purpose—to see what an execution was really like, and write a description of it.

The common herd meanwhile took their places at the barriers, and held out resolutely against the heavy downfalling rain. There was no other way of securing a good point of view, for every hour a fresh influx of sight-seers arrived. To pass the time songs were sung—the loud choruses of which pene-

trated the prison walls and reached the ears of the woman for whose death agonies the mob was waiting.

More on account of his being a minister of the gospel than because he was Ann's relative, William Bradshaw obtained an interview with Ann. He found her pale and wasted, as he had expected. She rose when he entered, and said calmly,

"Well, William, what made you come?"

"Was it so unnatural?" he asked almost savagely; and they were for some time silent.

Throughout the interview they were not left alone; but the warder present retired to the other side of the room, whilst they conversed in a low voice.

"You know, perhaps, that great efforts have been made to save you," he said.

"I have heard something of it. Without avail?"

"Yes; I am sorry to say we have done no good."

"I thought you would not," she said; "I felt that I was to die."

"Heaven have mercy upon you, Ann," said William; and they were silent again.

"You think me guilty, like the rest?" she said presently, but without any emotion in her voice.

"What can I think? After the trial—after the evidence that was produced. But you are so near the end now. You would not go out of the world in silence. Confess if you are guilty."

She smiled as she replied,

"It would avail me little whatever I may say

now. It has all been settled. They have made up their minds to kill me."

"Have you thought of the horror and degradation of such a death?" he asked in a low, eager tone. "At least, you might escape that."

"Escape?"

"By dying another way!"

"I do not understand!"

"You don't think he is listening, do you?"

"No."

"I could give you the means of instantaneous death—to be used only at the last hour—when you are certain there is no hope left. Have you the courage?"

"What is it? Is it——"

"Yes. For your life do not speak the word out loud. I have it here in my hand. When I say good-by, and shake you by the hand, I will leave it there."

When they had been silent for a few more minutes, she said,

"Why do you do this? It is from no love for me."

"You must not say that, Ann," the other replied hastily, but trembling as he spoke, and keeping his eyes fixed steadfastly upon the ground. "You cannot think that I can quite forget the past. You do not know what I have suffered—on your account. How else can I help you at this dreadful crisis? They have tried you, and found you guilty of the crime. None on earth can say whether justly or unjustly. There is, it seems to me, no hope of life;

but you may yet defeat those who would couple your memory with the ignominy of a scaffold."

"My memory is of most value to those who are left behind," she said, bitterly.

"You cannot doubt my motive, Ann. You must know what a risk I run in doing this. If it were known I should be disgraced—ruined."

"Yes, yes, I know that. Thank you for helping me. I am indeed grateful for the greatest boon that I can hope for; after life is death."

A few minutes after he had taken his leave. She watched him until the door closed with a heavy clang; then listened to his footsteps until the sound died away in the distance.

"What an end to it all!" she thought, as she covered her face with her hands. "What a gloomy farce it has been! What a waste of time! What folly! But at least I can cheat them at last!"

In the bosom of her dress she had concealed a tiny phial he had given her—such a tiny phial, but filled with what deadly stuff!

3.

One day James Jarman found lying at his hotel a letter, written by an old friend. He did not recognise the writing, for it was many long years since he last saw it. Neither was the signature very legible, and for some time he was unable to spell out the name of Richard Starkey. During the earlier stages of Ann's examination, before she was committed for trial, he had several times heard what the landlord was called, but never once connected the man with the felonious clerk at Hankershanks's warehouse, down the crooked city lane. As he read this letter, however, the whole truth flashed upon him, and he came once more, though only in imagination as yet, face to face with his old enemy.

The writer said that he would have written sooner, to ask for an interview, but had been languishing for more than a month past in the county gaol, where he had been incarcerated for debt. Now that he had regained his liberty he was in such a destitute condition, he could not scrape together the money to pay his fare to town. No time was to be lost; and he therefore begged that James would, if possible, at once come down, and see him at the address he gave—a village on the outskirts of the little bathing-place where the murder had taken place.

The reason why this interview was requested, was that Richard Starkey had valuable information to impart, which might be worth a price. He was a poor man, he said, but he hoped an honest one, and would not be found unreasonable. Without pausing for a moment to ask himself what the information might be, James prepared to obey the other's bidding. He called for a railway guide, ascertained the time a train would start, put his cheque-book, some gold and notes, and a pistol into his pocket, and sent for a cab.

The village whence Starkey had dated his letter, lay about half a mile or so from the town by the side of the sea. There was one way to it over the cliffs, but at low tide it could be approached much more quickly by the sands, only this way was dangerous unless you were quite sure when the sea would return again. James Jarman, however, chose the latter, for the tide had just turned, and was going rapidly out. In a short time, walking at a brisk pace, he had reached his journey's end.

He knocked at the door of a wretchedly-poor-looking cottage, scarcely better than a mud hovel, which from the directions he had received, he presumed was the place where Starkey was to be found. A woman, who answered the door, eyed him for some moments suspiciously, before making any reply. Then she informed him that Starkey had gone out for a walk.

"Are you the person he expected?"

"Yes."

"He has gone towards the town then, to meet you."

If this were the case he had probably gone by the path over the cliffs. Jarman suggested this hypothesis.

"Yes, it was high tide when he left. It's very dangerous to go by the lower road when the tide comes in; it comes so fast. There was a man drowned there only this last week—but they will go that way. It's a good deal nearer, you see."

James Jarman left word that he would come back in about an hour's time, if he should miss the person he wanted to see, but that he intended to walk along the top of the cliff, and keep a sharp look-out. When he had gone a few yards from the door, the woman called to him.

"If you're a stranger in these parts, I might as well tell you to be careful not to go too near the edge of the cliff; it has given way in two or three places, this rough weather. The whole lot will come down together some of these days."

"Thank you," he replied, "I will take care."

As he walked away he looked at his watch—in less than two hours' time night would fall. "I hope I shall meet the fellow," he thought, "or it may be too dark to travel by either road in safety."

It was not a pleasant day for a walk; the north-east wind drove the rain against his back. In front of him the town lay half-hidden in a mist. The naked fields stretched away on the right; on the left lay the sea. There was but one solitary sail to be seen; it was too rough for the fishermen to venture

out, and such strange boats as had taken refuge in the bay, were hidden from view by a projecting portion of the cliff. As he walked along, he noticed several places where the earth had given way, and fallen over on the beach below. In others, alarming crevices yawned across his path. The roadway had fallen altogether at one point, dragging with it some iron railings that had stood between it and the edge of the precipice, and which now, twisted out of shape, hung over the side, waiting for a violent gust of wind to blow them down into the sea.

James Jarman shaded his eyes, and peered long and anxiously across the country towards the town.

"How provoking that I should have missed him," he said; "what rascality has the fellow to propose? I must see him, I suppose, and yet I have not an hour to waste."

He wandered on until he reached the top of the steps leading down on to the beach, and passed by those railings upon which Mr. Starkey in times past had smoked so many meditative pipes, to gaze up at the house where Ann had lived and Draper had died. Its aspect was at this moment more desolate than ever; the rough weather of the last few days had seriously damaged the stucco of the lower story. One of the chimney-pots had been blown over, and had fallen through the roof. The place had certainly the appearance of being under some sort of ban. No wonder the children of the neighbourhood fought shy of it at nightfall, with the belief that it was haunted. The boldest hearted and most audacious urchin of the neighbourhood had been known

in the broad day light to knock a loud double knock at the door, and call out, "Come on, Ghosty!" but a faint rustle within, responsive as it seemed to his voice, had sent him flying in wild terror from the spot.

James Jarman gazed for some time upon the exterior of the dreary building before he turned his face again to the east. It was plain to see from his dark brow that his protracted meditations had summoned up no pleasant memories. He strode along at a rapid pace now, and reached the little village in less than half the time it had previously taken him to make the journey, but he had, however, been a long while absent, and the twilight was fast changing into darkness.

Almost at the moment, however, that he was about to knock at the cottage door, a voice called to him by name from a stile close at hand. He paused and waited, and a figure came forward through the twilight. It was Starkey.

"Oh," said Jarman, "you have come at last. I was afraid I could not wait."

"You did well to wait. What I have to say to you is very particular."

"You are Richard Starkey, are you not?"

"To be sure, sir. It is so long ago since we were clerks together. You forget me; I am much changed."

"You appear to be changed," Jarman replied, carelessly. "Well?"

"I suffered a great deal after I left the house there down the city lane. That cold-blooded old

scoundrel is dead since then. You know that, I suppose?"

"I know that Mr. Hankershanks is dead."

"Well, Mr. Hankershanks, if you like it better. You had more cause than I had to cherish his memory. He never did me a good turn that I know of. He thrust me out into the street like a dog to starve. I never forget an injury, I don't. I've sworn a thousand times I would be even with all concerned in that business."

Jarman looked at his watch.

"I have exactly three quarters of an hour to catch my train. I can give you fifteen minutes. Is that time enough for you to say what you have got to say?"

"Three minutes will do; but I cannot say it here."

"Where then?"

"Somewhere where we can be by ourselves. I'm sorry you're in such a hurry, though I shall have to see you again, I am afraid."

"It is your fault that the time has been lost. I have been waiting for you two hours at least."

"I did not expect you down so soon, and I did not want to be seen by any of the townspeople. Since my smash up, they've been very nasty tempered, some of them. I went round through the fields to the railway. That's how we missed one another."

"Do not let us waste any more time now. Which way shall we walk? You can say what you have to say as we go along."

"You'll hardly catch the train by the upper road. We shall see fewer people on the sands. Shall we go that way?"

"If it is safe."

"Safe? How do you mean?"

Starkey looked up into his face with an ugly leer, as he said this:

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of the tide, that's all," replied Jarman, returning his look with a hard stare.

4.

"Oh," said Starkey, "that's all, is it? There's no fear of that," he continued, after peering for a few moments silently out towards the sea. "We shan't take long getting to the steps."

"Let us set off then at once."

Without wasting any more time in conversation, they started upon their walk, and continued on their way for some time in silence. The scene was at that moment gloomy enough to have frightened a timid wayfarer who might have been passing that way without a guide. The sun had some time ago sunk below the horizon. The low wailing sound of distant wind crept over the water, betokening a coming storm. Some sea birds overhead wheeled round in circles, waking the echoes with their shrill cries.

When they had pursued their journey for some ten minutes or so, Starkey, who up to this seemed to have been waiting for the other to speak, impatiently broke the long silence.

"Unless we say what we have got to say at once, the time will come for us to separate before anything has been decided on."

Jarman came to a standstill.

"It was you who wrote to me, not I to you.

It was you who said that you had information to impart."

"Yes, I did. About this murder."

Without one muscle of his face moving, Jarman waited with his eyes fixed steadily upon the other.

"Well?"

"You know what I have got to say, James Jarman, though you may be in ignorance of the means by which I got at the truth. You know though that I know the truth, even by what I have said; before, indeed, I have said anything."

"Perhaps so. Well?"

"I told you awhile ago I never forget or forgive those who have injured me. Don't run away with the idea from those words that I want a terrible revenge, like a person in a play or a tale-book. I want revenge, of course, but my notion of revenge is money. Pay me well, and it will be well worth your while to shut my mouth. Do you hear?"

"I hear; but suppose you give me a notion of what you are to shut your mouth on. I am quite in the dark so far."

"Not at all in the dark, begging your pardon, James Jarman; but you wish to be on the safe side, I see, and hear what is to be heard before committing yourself."

"That is quite right. I wish to hear if there be anything worth hearing. Only come to the point; we have no time to spare."

"I need not waste the time, then, by telling you

what you know. We commence by taking it for granted that the person lying in Newgate, accused of Draper's murder, is innocent."

"Of course she is. Well!"

"Of course she is! You own that, then? And pray who is guilty?"

"I accuse no one. Who says it was a murder at all?"

"I do!" cried Starkey with sudden passion, and shaking as he spoke a trembling finger in the other's face—"I do; and that you are the murderer!"

There was a momentary silence; and while Jarman, deadly white, stood gazing upon his accuser, his hand crept upwards towards his breast pocket, where the pistol was. Starkey, without noticing this movement continued his accusation with breathless eagerness.

"I know you did it, because I have the proof. Because I have a scrap of paper that was picked up by the dead man's bedside. There are only a few words, but they are enough to hang you if they saw the light."

"And what do you propose?"

"To sell them to you."

"For how much?"

"Five thousand pounds. It's dirt cheap to a man with your money. Too cheap."

"They are a forgery, perhaps."

"You know they are no forgery, even before you see them. They were written by Draper a few minutes after you had left, and a few moments before he died. They say simply that you have

been in there to see him, that you gave him his medicine, and that you poured in it the poison from the medicine chest."

"Show me the paper."

"I have not got it here. Bring me the money to-morrow, and you shall have it. When the paper is once destroyed you will be safe enough, for without proof who would believe so wild a tale? When the girl is dead too——"

The other turned upon him with an oath, which was uttered almost like the snarl of a savage beast.

"You unutterable scoundrel! do you think I am going to let her die as you propose doing? There are ten days left. I am going to wait twelve hours longer for the secretary's reply. To-night I start for the country to see him. If the answer is unfavourable, I give myself into custody; and to guard against the frustration of my purpose by sudden death, I have written a full confession of the deed, and carry it at this moment in a pocket-book at my breast."

Starkey was silent for a moment, and seemed to weigh the other's reply.

"Why have you delayed so long? Because you thought she was certain to be acquitted?"

"Yes; because I was assured by the best legal authorities at every step of the unhappy affair, that at the next her release was certain. Because I loved her, and love is selfish. Because I knew at any moment I could save her, and thus allowed her to suffer the suspense yet a little and a little longer in

the hope that all would go well, and we might be happy together. Can you understand now?"

"I think so; and I can also understand that as her life is as dear to you as your own, or more, it will be as much worth your while as ever to buy my secret. I will sell it you for double the amount I first mentioned."

During the last few sentences, wholly carried away by the interest of the subject in hand, they had remained quite motionless. Jarman was the first to make any movement.

"You must come up to town to-morrow, and we will decide what the price is to be when I have the secretary's reply. You are without a pound you say?"

"Yes."

"I will give you some money before I leave; but we must get on now. Is not that the water coming in. I cannot see. Good God! what was that?"

Starkey shaded his eyes, and strove to pierce the darkness. Then pulled his companion by the arm, and in a frightened voice, said,

"By Heaven! it is the tide coming in, and some of the cliff in front has fallen down. I hope no more will fall."

"We had better go back."

"No, no; the water's in behind us now. This is a sort of bay we are in. We must run for it. We shall have to wade up to our knees, I expect, to reach the steps."

"You should have known that there was not time to come by the shore. Your stupidity may cost us our lives."

As Jarman spoke he gazed wistfully up at the beetling cliffs over head. Escape was impracticable in that direction. A little further on the base of the cliff could only be seen at intervals, between the advancing and retiring waves. The sea was making fast, and not a moment was to be lost.

They were yet four or five hundred yards distant from the steps by which they hoped to ascend to the road above. Every step, however, that they took brought them further out, and the water already reached their knees.

Breathless and drenched to the skin, they with a desperate effort passed the point, but the worst had yet to come. The cliffs jutted out again before them, and large masses of rock scattered about made it almost impossible to keep a firm footing against the violence of the waves. As they turned the next corner a large wave came making towards them, gathering force as it approached and swelling its gigantic mass so as to shut out the view of all beyond.

As it came, Jarman fixed himself as firmly as he could to resist the shock, and bowed his head before the wall of water towering over him.

Next moment, however, with a roll like thunder, it had broken above him and he was swept off his feet, and hurled headlong beneath the swollen volume of water that closed over head. Stunned, but not

senseless yet, he struggled to his feet again, and looked around for his companion. At a dozen yards distant, he heard a faint cry from the sea, which bore the drowning wretch away.

Setting his teeth, and bracing up what strength remained to him, Jarman made another desperate effort to reach the point of safety. Another wave came rolling in, and broke above his head. Again he was dashed head first among the broken rocks. Again, bleeding from his wounds, blinded by the foam, he struggled on. The voice of his old enemy was long since choked by the water in his throat, but the wailing wind seemed to imitate the death-cry he had heard. Perhaps he fancied, too, that his own death-knell was ringing in his ears.

Overhead somewhere a church bell was tolling, and the wind carried the sound towards him. For a moment once, out at sea, he saw a light flash out across the water, and thought he heard a signal of distress. Now he had reached the foot of the steps, or the place where the steps had been; but there he saw that his case was hopeless. The noise he had heard a while ago was that of the falling cliff at this point. He was, as it were in a corner, out of reach of all hope, and seemed to understand that the supreme moment was at hand. Then he turned his back to the town, and faced his death.

Was there borne upon the wind to the world he left behind—to her whom he had so dearly and so deeply loved—to her for whose sake he had imperilled his soul—a stray word of the dying prayer he breathed for her happiness and safety?

A mighty wave came thundering in, and struck him senseless at a blow, then carried him dead out to sea.

5.

THIS all happened ten days before the Monday when Ann was to be hanged. The hours of that last day passed with painful tediousness, although the poor girl trembled at each stroke of the clock.

She sat silent and motionless, her hands clasped, her chin resting on her breast. A terrible calmness had come over her, for she was weary of struggling against her fate. They had condemned her to death —they were going to kill her for a crime she was innocent of—but there was no help.

No; nothing on earth could save her. If the Secretary of State had sent a favourable reply, before this she would have heard the particulars. They would not keep her in ignorance many moments, the chaplain had told her, but she must not hope. No; she must make up her mind that her life was over—that to-morrow she must die.

Finally, she had made up her mind to this, and in a stony silence was waiting for the gathering of the darkness of her last night on earth. At length the night came on, and then the faint murmur of the brutal rabble without swelled into a roar. The harsh sound of a song, discordantly chanted within only a few yards of her, from a hundred throats,

penetracted to her cell. The warder looked towards her with a shrinking dread in his eyes, wondering whether she heard.

She looked up and listened.

"It is like the theatre," she said. "They are waiting for the play to begin. I hardly tremble as much as I did that night I acted at the country playhouse."

But as the sound of the song grew louder, she sank down, shuddering, and hid her face.

Heaven help the wretched prisoner in such a case! We are accustomed to find authors who would mete out a terrible fate for the villain in their books—select many forms of death more or less horrible; but what terrors can really surpass those of the condemned cell—of the helpless wretch, shivering within earshot of the mob, athirst for his blood, knowing that there is no possible chance of escape—that he is weak and helpless as a babe, and that a few hours hence at most, they will come and bind him hand and foot, and carry him out, if he be too weak with terror to walk, and strangle him, while the crowd hoot and hiss!

This fearful day at length came to an end. The night set in as has been said, and the mob gathered denser and denser without the prison walls. But about eleven o'clock the door of the cell opened, and the Governor, bearing a paper in his hand, appeared upon the threshold. She rose all in a tremble, and gasping for breath. Had it been a disappointment, she felt that the shock must have

struck her dead. But she read in that kind face before her as in a book that hope was not dead.

In that water-proof pocket-book which James Jarman had bought at the little seaside town, he had placed the confession he had written. When his body was picked up some few days after his death by a French fishing-boat the documents were forwarded as soon as possible by the Consul at Calais to the Secretary of State in England. Almost at the same time the important scrap of paper which Starkey had wanted to sell was found among the papers he had left at the cottage; and his dead body soon after being also found, this other proof was taken to the nearest magistrate by the woman under whose roof he had been living for some few days before the accident.

There were other papers besides the confession found in Jarman's pocket-book—a letter of instructions to his solicitor, and a letter to Ann. The latter ran thus:—

"When you read this, my own darling, if ever you do read it, you will have learnt to hate me—to execrate my memory. How can I hope to prove to you that I did all I have done for your sake? I cannot even persuade myself that such was the case. When I did it I was in ignorance of your marriage, and I hoped that if you left him you would come to me. It is only such misery as I have suffered that can be looked for when we tamper with Heaven's will and seek to make our hands the instruments of God's wrath. If you live long enough

to forget all this and to be happy, dearest, as I pray that heaven in its mercy will permit you, you will be rich with the money I have left for you. Do not reject it, because he who gave it you was he who killed your love. I always meant it should be yours. It was my dream when miles and miles away. It was my dream too, then, that I might share it with you. But that was not to be. Perhaps I shall be dead before you read this. I have made up my mind to kill myself when I am sure of your safety. God bless you, my darling. You know not how bitterly I repent the sufferings I have caused you; but you know not how I hated him when I did it, and when his baseness and treachery were fresh in my mind. Forgive me and forget me. It is too late now to undo the past. But, oh, if I could unlive my life! If I could live but one moment in your love before what is to come!"

The story of James Jarman's love ends here with Ann's release from prison.

POSTSCRIPT.

IN A BOX AT THE STRAND.

It was that period of the year when so many people are so very miserable, and which—for some reason or other hitherto unexplained — it is the custom to call Merry Christmas.

It was one of the "good old-fashioned" Christmases, bitterly cold and bleak. The old-fashioned snow, which is so trying to the worn-out boots of some poor people, lay deep upon the ground. The ice was thick, and there was rare skating in the Parks. Some thousands who did not skate, however, were rather uncomfortable in their cellars and attics without any fire. Some even perished from cold in the streets. It was merry Christmas time.

Yes, it was merry Christmas time. The merry tradesmen were balancing their books. Presently their merry little bills would be sent in to us. The merry butcher had gaily decked with mistletoe a coarse kind of meat, specially purchased for this festive season, and called Christmas beef. The merry publican had, with a free and liberal hand, mixed his Christmas gin. The merry grocer, the merry greengrocer—all of the merry band, had got

their little Christmas swindles ready, and they were all joyously decorated with sprigs of holly. As yet the merry chemist showed no sign; his time would come anon.

First in the field, however, was the merry publisher, who, of all his brothers, made the most noise about the coming time of jollity and good-fellowship. This year he was going in more heavily than usual for his Christmas numbers. He was going to have lots of pictures and lots of comic stories. All the droll dogs upon town were to kick up their literary heels in his journals and magazines. He did not care how funny they were at this jovial time, and he patted them on the back in his most fatherly style, and bade them, if possible, surpass themselves; only he beat them down to the last shilling in their prices, for all that.

Those open-hearted fellows, too—the theatrical managers— were all hard at work getting up their Christmas entertainments with no other object in life —if you will only believe me—than giving us a right down good Christmas treat, which we might all of us come and see, if we paid for it.

It was, as I have said, merry Christmas time, and a couple of score and more servants, messengers, shopboys, printers' devils, cabmen, 'busmen, and small relations had wished me the compliments of the season at an average of two shillings and six-pence per head all round. It was boxing-night, and there was a new burlesque being performed for the first time at the Strand Theatre, and a friend and myself had a private box.

It cannot exactly be said that all the world was that night at the Strand, because the little theatre will hold, when at its fullest, but few people, and probably there was not a seat to spare just then in any house in London, but there were many notabilities present. There were gentlemen of the press in the stalls, lofty-browed, calm and composed, cold and critical. There was also rank and fashion. The tawny moustache—the white moustache—the moustache of promise, as yet only a hair or two. And there was beauty, or what passes for it. There was golden beauty—very golden, with if anything an orange tint, except at the roots. There was dark beauty, scornfully critical of golden beauty, knowing how that sort of thing is done, you know—and just a little envious of the effect. There were several celebrated people—Jason Burgoyne, Little Addleton, two actresses without engagements, a literary lord, a lord famous for being a lord or for something else I do not at the moment remember. A famous foreigner unknown over here, and poohpoohed accordingly. Some of our princes of commerce—the writer of this narrative and his friend Mr. Sm*th of the St*ck E*ch*nge.

We had all come to see the new burlesque—a burlesque by one of the busy B's who have the burlesque monopoly at our London theatres, and we had made up our minds to be delighted. Nor were we disappointed. How could we be? There were the gay airs from the music halls (drat those ungenteel places for getting hold of all the lively music). There were the bright dresses, the high-

heeled satin boots, the pretty faces, and shapely limbs. There were in one scene all together doing their best, David James, Thomas Thorne, and Elise Holt, a trio, which, I suppose, was never equalled on this or any other stage since burlesque first came into fashion.

But before the burlesque began we had plenty to amuse ourselves with in looking at the rest of the company, and they too, perhaps, found some amusement in looking at us. My friend Sm*th, it is well known in literary and artistic circles, is a member of the Arundel, the Junior Garrick, and one or two other clubs of that character where he makes many friends, whom he afterwards invites down to his villa at Putney, at which I may say there are at certain seasons jinks of the highest character and without limit. This evening he was nodding to one and the other until the present writer began to feel almost savage that he knew no friends whom he in his turn could nod to, if only to show that he had a friend or two in the world as well as some other people. Sm*th even left the box to pay visits to his numerous acquaintance, and left the gentleman whom he had come with to amuse himself with the playbill.

He thus amused himself for sometime until presently Sm*th came rushing back in a state of great excitement.

"Didn't I once hear you say you were acquainted with Miss Whitaker—Ann Whitaker—Mrs. Draper that was—the actress, you know?"

"Yes, I do know her," I replied.

"Then there she is the box opposite, all by herself, and I'm dying to make her acquaintance."

There, indeed, sat the Ann Whitaker of the foregoing narrative, alone, as my friend had said, looking much prettier, I thought, than I had ever seen her, and, as usual, exquisitely dressed. Many glasses were turned upon her, and a murmur of recognition and astonishment passed round the house —for it was well known that she was engaged for the burlesque opening to the pantomime at the Great Sahara.

None of us had seen her for some time. She had been at Paris for six months, specially engaged as the *Meese Anglaise* in Offenbach's new opera of *Satan en Pantoufle*. She had grown somewhat plumper, I fancied, and her cheeks were rosier than of yore. These changes made me half inclined to think, for a moment, that I might have been mistaken, and that it really was not Mrs. Draper; but now she caught my eye, and the old sweet smile lit up her face, and she bowed as she used to do when the "gods" thundered out their applause upon her entrance.

As it was now, some of the "gods" here had recognised the favourite, and were pointing her out eagerly to one another. Some of them applauded; and one voice called out, "Bravo, Whitaker." This made her glance up and smile, but immediately afterwards blush, and draw back as much as possible behind the curtain of the box.

That fellow, Sm*th, would not be content unless he was taken round to this comedy queen, and intro-

duced to her with all due forms and ceremonies. Burgoyne came up into the box also, and Little Addleton, and several others. It was fortunate she had the box all to herself, or there would not have been anything like room enough for all her admirers. As it was some were obliged to stand out in the lobby. Under this disadvantage, and from far away in the background, one loud-voiced little man addressed stentorian compliments to her majesty, which were perfectly audible, and highly appreciated by the inmates of the stalls.

She told us that the reason she was here to-night instead of at the Great Sahara, was because she had been compelled, owing to the disgraceful behaviour of its manager, to throw up her engagement only that very morning. Inquiry was made as to the nature of the manager's offence. "Oh," she said, impatiently, "it was always the same story —so unreasonable—so absurd; nobody else in the world, in fact, could possibly put up with half she had had to submit to from that man."

We all listened most respectfully to this statement, though some of us had heard something of the same sort before, with regard to other men, for her majesty was somewhat celebrated for her quarrels and law-suits. A misguided young fellow present, observed,—

"You often quarrel with your managers, don't you?"

"They quarrel with me," she replied. "I cannot be expected to suffer every insult and indignity, can I?"

We all indignantly declared that she had suffered far too much as it was.

"At any rate, Mr. Russet will have to do without me to-night."

"He can't," said Little Addleton, "he'll break down to a certainty."

"I'm sorry for him, that's all," her majesty replied; "I suppose they'll get Panglass to read the part, or poor dear old Montflummerie. I wonder how they'll dress the character? I ordered my dresses from Paris; I wouldn't wear any of Russet's rubbish. Mine cost over three thousand francs. Grevin gave me the designs."

We all, in chorus, expressed our conviction that the dresses must be very beautiful.

"Yes, they're well enough," she said, "and after all the expense, I cannot help thinking that it is very ungentlemanly of Russet."

We all agreed that Russet was no gentleman. However, the loss would be his.

"You see," said Ann, with a smile, "he has so often disappointed the public. In fact, he scarcely ever keeps a promise when he makes one. I should not wonder at all if the public did not some day tear up his benches."

We agreed that it was no more than Russet ought to expect. I am not quite sure that there was any proposition in the world, possible or impossible, that we should not have readily agreed to, had it emanated from the same source. I will not go as far to say that we truckled somewhat humbly to this imperious beauty; but it must be admitted we

were singularly unanimous in our assent to whatever she was pleased to observe.

I have said beauty. Perhaps that is a mistake. She was not a beauty; certainly I never heard any other lady allow that she had a perfect feature in her face. She was "so made up," the other ladies at the theatre protested. Anyone with that quantity of paint on must look pretty, they all agreed. She was one of those who attract the eyes of all the men among the audience, and the men—a spiritless sex, when argued with by the other and superior sex, were generally too cowardly to defend their opinion. Besides, it was decidedly not a high style of beauty, and to admire it must betoken an imperfect judgment.

Some who sought for an excuse, in an unguarded moment of enthusiasm, after expressing their unqualified admiration, said,

"It is not so much the face as the general effect. There is an air, a style, a *je ne sais quoi*."

Endeavouring to describe what this je-ne-sais-quoishness consisted of, some of these gentlemen explained that the air and style they alluded to did not depend upon the richness of the attire. "A simple muslin dress and a simple blue ribbon," they were fond of saying,—and this is the idea of most men about women's clothes. Simplicity and neatness are, they pretend, the most desirable attributes of a pretty toilet. But ladies themselves know the difference between a rich simplicity and a poor one. There is a simplicity of satin and velvet which will

give a *piquante* air to the plainest featured; but it costs a good deal of money.

Ann's dress was generally remarkable by the costliness of its details. The effect to a man's eyes was simplicity itself, and the very best taste. Only the women noticed the long drooping earrings loaded with diamonds; the profusion of rings and bracelets, and the necklace of glittering gems.

While the little court was yet sitting, the curtain rose on the burlesque, and we were all dismissed to our places. I heard Addleton talking to a friend as they walked away together:

"She looks more at her ease in that box than in another we once saw her in, eh?"

"Ah! she owes you more than she thinks for. It was you who first took the matter up, was it not?"

"Of course it was. These things are so soon forgotten. If I had not made a *cause célèbre* of it by my articles in the *Bombshell*."

"And that Methodist preacher sort-of-fellow, what was his name? that you wrote that tremendous smasher about. Let's see, what was he called? something like Railway?"

"Bradshaw."

"Ah, to be sure. What has become of him?"

"He fell all at once as quickly as he had risen. He has been dead about a couple of years. I suppose hardly anybody remembers him."

"Not they. Who remembers anything now-a-days? I myself forget who it really was who killed

poor what's-his-name—Thing-em-bob that our friend there was tried about."

"Jarman, was it not? A sort of madman I always thought him. Didn't you, Yolland?"

"Must have been," said the gentleman appealed to. "I suppose he had, though, mad or sane, scraped together a tolerably large fortune. He left every penny of it to her, I believe."

"Yes; she came out of that affair pretty well, all things considered. She is about the richest woman there is on the stage."

"I wonder she is on the stage at all. She seems to give her managers a good deal of trouble."

"I suppose it is because she does that they are so fond of her. There's not another woman alive, with double her talents and good looks, that they would stand her tricks from. It's wonderful what luck some people have."

"Silence! there in front," cried somebody from the front row of the pit behind them, and the gentlemen held their tongues, and listened to the wit and humour. Presently, my friend Sm*th pulled my arm and pointed to the box opposite. There I saw a bald-headed gentleman looking very hot and excited, endeavouring to make some explanation to which Ann would not listen.

"Isn't that Russet?"

"Yes."

"He's come to beg her on his bended knees to go and play at his theatre to-night."

"And she wont."

"Not she."

"But he seems to be using strong arguments. Perhaps he's offering to double her salary."

"That's like Russet, who would beat a ballet girl down to the utmost farthing."

"See, she listens favourably. How fast he is talking! She is looking at her watch. He is looking at his."

"She won't go, though."

"Yes, she will."

"She has risen."

"She is leaving the box on his arm."

"What do you say to leaving the rest of the burlesque unseen and running round to the other theatre to see her come on?"

"Let's stop another scene to give her time to dress, and then we'll rush over in a Hansom."

It was one of those triumphs, the papers said next day, which are so rare on the modern stage. The welcome accorded to the favourite actress was perfectly overwhelming. For many minutes she was unable to speak, but stood bowing her acknowledgments to the repeated bursts of applause.

How Russet must have cursed her beneath his breath, although he smiled so sweetly. Afterwards he was heard so say—

"That woman is the most heartless, selfish, ungrateful alive. What do the public see in her, I should like to know? She shall never again act at my theatre. Crowded houses every night, do you say? Yes, that's all very well, but look what she costs me."

Nevertheless, in spite of this resolve, he engaged her again before the year was out, having lost a mint of money by somebody else in the meantime.

We stayed out the burlesque opening, my friend and I, and I never saw Ann to greater advantage. Every dance and song of hers were loudly encored, every speech applauded to the echo. When the Harlequinade was about half over, and we were standing under the pillars of the front entrance, her brougham passed by, and she nodded and smiled to us. A ragged rascal, who early in the evening, probably, had been selling bills, and was now touting for odd jobs—hailing cabs, opening the doors, and the like—caught sight of her, and ran by the side, touching the brim of his greasy hat, and whining out his little story.

"Good evening to you, Miss! A happy new year to you, Miss. You haven't forgot me, Miss, I'm sure. Pickering, Miss; don't you remember? Happy to drink your health, Miss. Thank you kindly. God bless you."

Next moment the darkness of night had swallowed her up. She faded from our view as she will fade presently from the recollection of the reader who a moment hence lays down this volume. Our last glimpse of her is of a bright face and a merry smile. Perhaps when she had leant back and closed the window, with the recollection of the life that was gone for ever, and the love that lay for ever dead, some bitter tears rose to her eyes.

For my part I cannot bear to think of her thus, alone in the world, with those who loved her, and

whom she loved all dead. I like to think of her best as she appears at night in the lighted theatre, when the overture has ceased, and the curtain rises, and she comes forward, bright and flashing with a joyous laugh—a laugh that rings in my memory now as I lay down my pen.

THE END.

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